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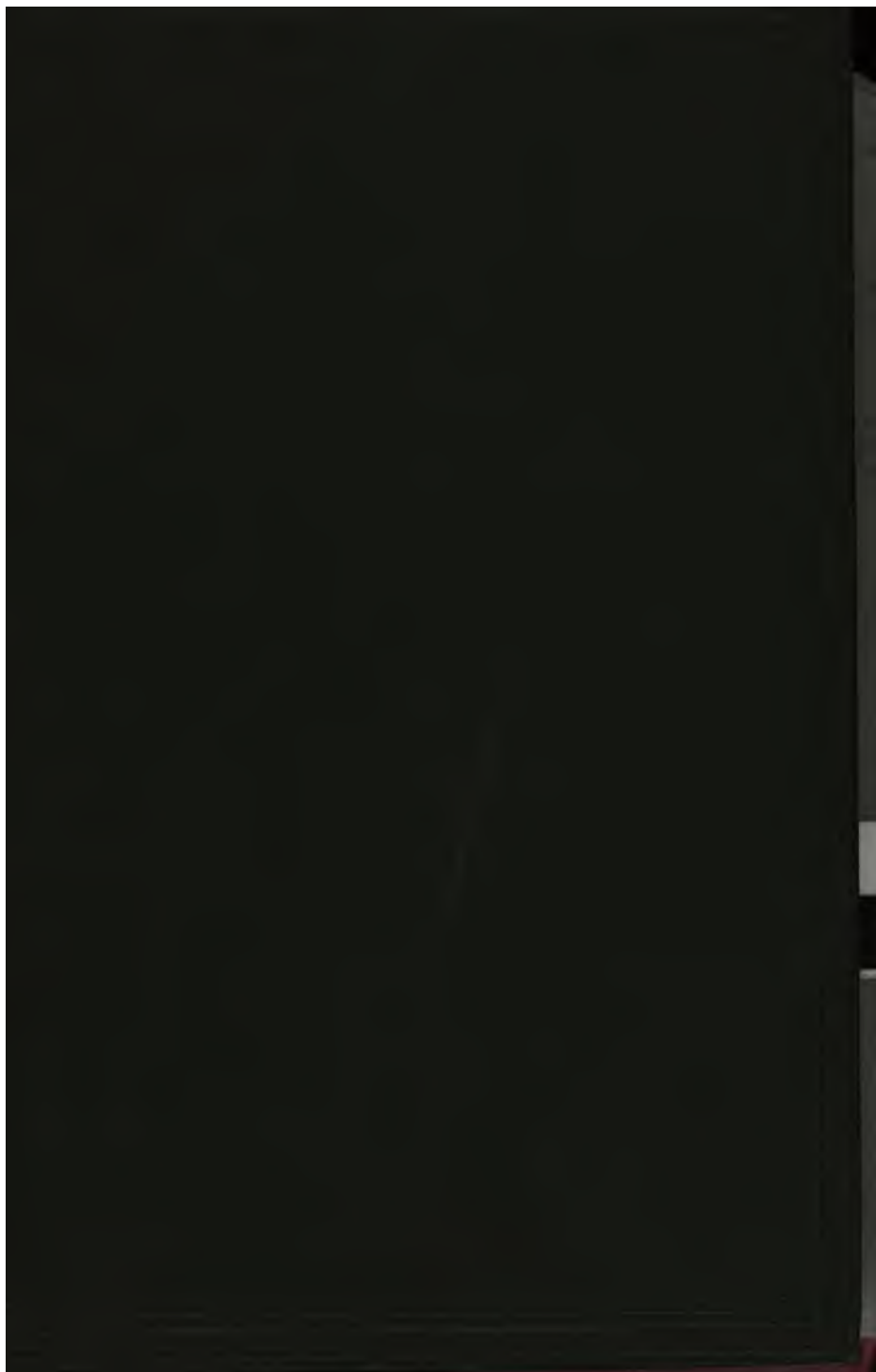
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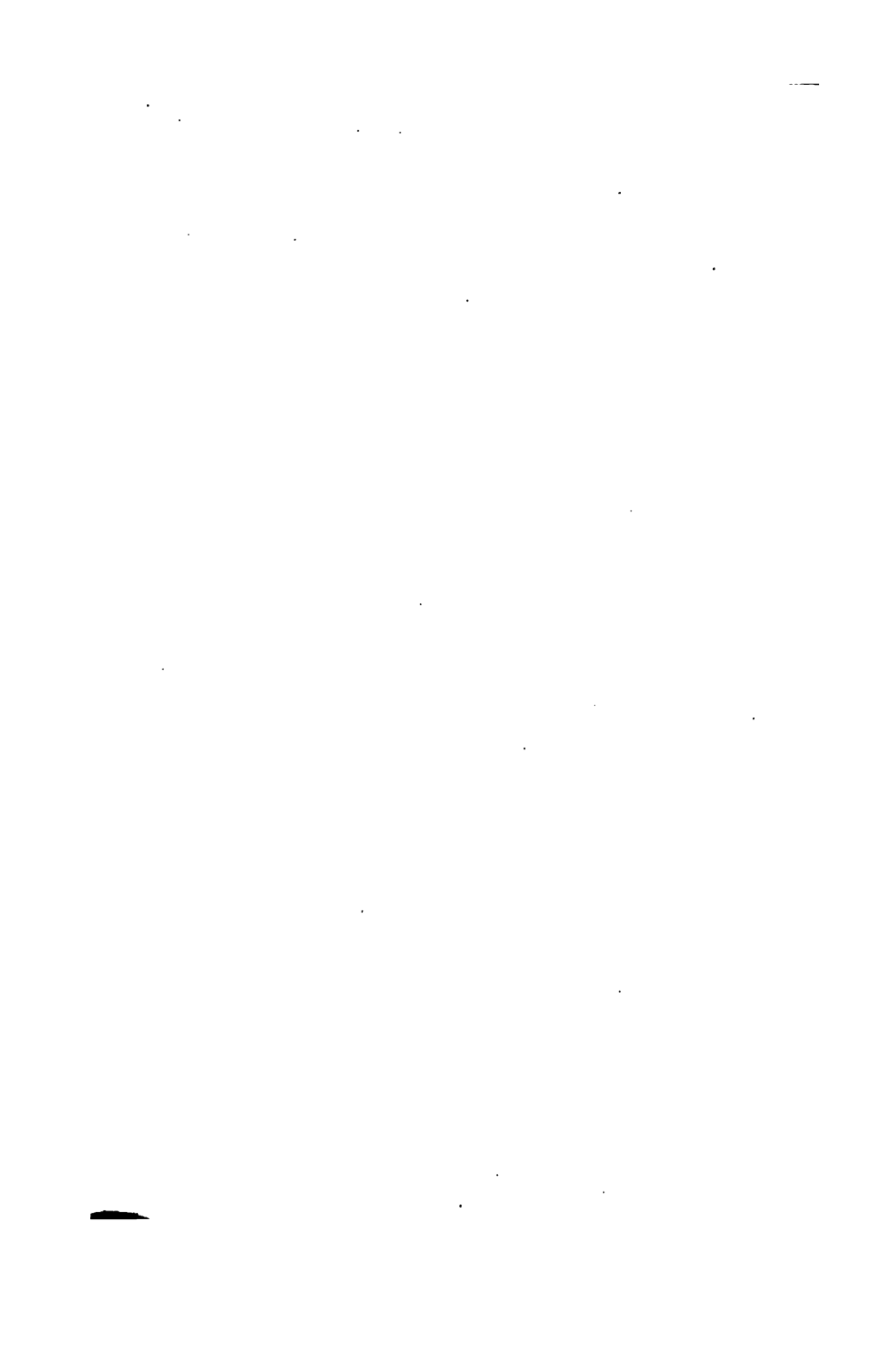
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MARK EYLMER'S REVENGE.

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VOL. I.



# MARK EYLMER'S REVENGE.

BY

MRS. J. K. SPENDER,

AUTHOR OF

“JOCELYN’S MISTAKE,” “PARTED LIVES,”

“HER OWN FAULT.”

&c. &c.

“How would you be  
If He, which is the top of judgment, should  
But judge you as you are? O think on that;  
And mercy then will breathe within your lips,  
Like man new made.”

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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## MARK EYLMER'S REVENGE.

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### PROLOGUE.

“**Y**ES, I have made up my mind to accept the office. They have asked me three times already, and I cannot, without being ungracious, back out of it any longer. I am fond of retirement, but though public life may go against the grain with me, one owes something to one's native place. And as long as my Maker grants me influence and intellect, I ought to show that my principles and ideas are not only talk, but that I can do a little for my generation, and the people amongst whom I live.”

The speaker, who spoke in a pompous oratorical voice, was George Gathorne, lawyer—or “Gee Gee,” as his detractors slightly called him—of the town of Middle Hampton; and he pronounced these words as he stepped into his comfortable little carriage, on a bright morning on the sixth of November, prepared to meet and accept the flatteries of his colleagues in the Town Council, as Mayor elect for the ensuing year. George Gathorne was a tall large-boned man, with a “head” which he had been told, “ought to make his fortune,”—the forehead being unusually bulging and preponderant—with fine eyes which rarely met the eyes of other people, and an expression of comfortable benevolent self-satisfaction. It was not often that he made so long a speech, since he spoke so little as seldom to risk making a mistake, and had gained a reputation for capacity and knowledge which was largely founded on his reticence, and more largely still on a



volume of what he chose to call "fugitive thoughts," which he had written and published for the benefit of a select coterie of his friends. He did not look like a poet, and the few words which he uttered had an unelastic dreariness about them which seemed to be quite unadapted to the ecstasies of the imagination. Probably if he had started in life by carrying a parcel of his own poems to a publisher's, he would have been speedily shown to the door and politely informed that his produce was unsaleable. But as his verses had been published at his own expense, and as they wounded nobody's feelings, produced no excitement whatever, and made nobody envious, they had quickly established his reputation at Middle Hampton. Henceforward, when George Gathorne said a remarkably foolish thing, he was supposed to be cramming his hallucinations into the metre of a sonnet; and if he happened to be not quite so acute as usual in business, every allowance was made for a

man who was supposed to be led away by the burning inspirations of his soul. His efforts to devote himself to the good of "the masses," when he might have been earning a celebrity which the world would have remembered, were appreciated as the efforts of a man who exercised a becoming self-denial. And his little wife who stood by the side of the carriage on this November morning, regardless of the east wind which was blowing on her face, and looking at him tenderly with her pretty blue eyes, whilst she saw that he was protected for his drive into Middle Hampton by a comfortable great coat, and a wolf-skin over his knees, duly admired the effort he was making on this occasion.

"Certainly, dear, you are right," she said with an encouraging smile, "I am glad you are so unselfish as to make up your mind."

For everybody had pronounced that George Gathorne was the fittest man for the post of Mayor in Middle Hampton,

and that he ought no longer to hide his talents under a napkin, and Mrs Gathorne was not likely to detect the flaw in the logic of this popular verdict. Society had agreed in crowning her husband with laurel leaves, and it seemed to her that it would be flying in the face of Providence for the man to refuse to wear his crown. Plutarch tells us that the enemies of Sylla gave him the title "happy," and yet the Roman conqueror lived to be the most miserable of men. Many men have since reaped the experience of Sylla, but few have been more in danger of forgetting the old adage, "Call no one happy till he dies," than George Gathorne on that November day.

If the jewel of perfect happiness is not to be found in this world, at any rate he seemed to have succeeded in finding something which very nearly resembled it. He blushed with conscious pride when envious acquaintances said to him.

"Oh *you!* you are a happy man—you have everything which heart can

desire!" and he was by no means offended when his friends re-echoed the strain and assured him that he had been born under a lucky star.

His success was all the more remarkable from the fact that it could by no means have been predicted in his youth. His childhood had been sickly and taciturn, whilst in early manhood he had been pronounced to be "a little strange." He had always been fond of books, but the reading which should have developed him, seemed to absorb him instead. He had been the son of parents with what are generally called "limited" means, and in order that he should carry out his project of educating himself, and entering the legal profession, it was necessary that he should serve as a clerk for a time in London. It was many years before he could return to take rank as a solicitor in his native town, but meanwhile he married a woman so superior to himself in force of character that, if she did not bring him money, she brought him some-

thing which was infinitely better, and unconsciously taking the lead in everything, she propelled her husband by her judicious efforts step by step up the ladder of the caste-beridden society of Middle Hampton. Not that this was accomplished by any series of elaborate social blockades, or by any assumption of equality with those who had risen ; but by dint of the warmth of her nature, her hearty sympathy, and her ready wit, Mrs. Gathorne fell as naturally into a choice niche in the little world of Middle Hampton, as the right ball fits into the right hole in the hands of a skilful player at bagatelle.

George Gathorne, who was proud of everything belonging to him, was of course immoderately proud of his wife. Had he uttered aloud his secret thoughts, he would have said to his fellow-citizens, "*My* wife, who is so very superior to your wives;" and he would have seen nothing ridiculous in the assumption. And certainly as Mrs. Gathorne stood at



her garden-gate with some knitted contrivance of lambs-wool called a "cloud," thrown carelessly over her abundant, silky, soft brown hair, with the November sun shining brightly on her merry good face, and lighting up the dimples on her cheeks and her almost perfect teeth—many a man might have been glad to call her "wife."

It was by no means strange that her attractive smile, her benign expression, and her winning manners had won for her a place, not only amongst the conservative respectabilities of old-fashioned Middle Hampton, but had also enabled her to set at naught those prejudices of rank and station which are easy enough for us to defy when we do not suffer practical consequences from them.

"Oh, it is only Mrs. Gathorne—it is her way—we don't know quite how she does it—but she is privileged, you know—she is never just like other people!" the magnates of Middle Hampton would say in excuse for their favourite, when, in

defiance of sectarianism, or of old social saws, she managed to keep on terms of pleasant acquaintanceship with her neighbours of various ranks and opinions who inhabited the surrounding villas in the suburbs of the town.

It was all the same to sweet-natured Jenny Gathorne whether she associated with the Middle Hamptonians who had just cast the chrysalis of the shop, and who retired to these suburban villas—afraid in their turn of soiling their newly-acquired feathers by coming in contact with those of their aspiring fellow-citizens, who, in a few months or years, were expecting to undergo a like transformation ; or whether she set herself to console the more aristocratic valetudinarians, who were sent by the doctors to the salubrious air of Middle Hampton, and who were fond of creeping with their rheumatism and gout to this out-of-the-way, cosy corner of the world, like shell-less lobsters fearful of being rubbed by their fellows.


For all of them, Jenny Gathorne—per-

fect gentlewoman as she was—had a cheery smile, or a witty saying which never offended them. She had cured her husband of fancying that he would be lowered in the social scale by having dealings with “that sort of people,” as he called the retired shopkeepers, just as she had cured him of a sentimental hankering after finery which he called “artistic,” but which savoured of vulgarity, and would not let him adorn his garden with fountains and allegorical statues.

“She lacks my sensibility—my love of art and poetry—but one can’t have everything, and she is always a help to me,” thought George Gathorne on the few occasions on which his wife’s taste differed from his own, but he invariably ended by deferring to her opinion, and it was to her prudent steering between extremes that he owed his popularity. He had begun practice as a solicitor in a small way at first, but, thanks to Jenny, he had gone steadily on to success. And now at the age of forty his triumphs

seemed to have been honestly won. If he was a man of few words, he was a hard-working and persevering one, and if he had gained credit for greater talents than he really possessed, he had shown that he had been able to bear fluctuations of fortune with fortitude.

Beginning his married life with a moderate capital, which he was generally supposed to have acquired in London, he had gone circumspectly to work ever since, putting his vanity on low diet, and only satisfying his modest ambitions quietly one by one. First he had removed his vine and olive branches from a small and incommodious house in a narrow street in the town, to the pretty villa which had been built for him on one of the hills, in a style of architecture of which even Ruskin could not have disapproved; next he had purchased some surrounding land, and laid out a garden of some acres, in which the choicest roses bloomed in summer, and next he had set up his horse and carriage. Last, but not



least, came the prospect of the Mayoralty, which with the apparent self-depreciation acquired from association with his wife, he had declined when first offered him, not meaning to accept it till he could "do the thing" well.

"In a year or two," he had said, "when I can afford it—perhaps I may see."

But now the long-expected day had come. The topmost apple of his desire seemed to be already within his reach. For the Mayoralty, it must be explained, was looked upon by George Gathorne as a stepping stone to a greater and more remote dignity. A future seat in Parliament had always been his dream.

"There is no earthly reason," he said to himself as he drove through the invigorating air, past the trees on which still lingered a few autumnal leaves, to the stone-built streets of Middle Hampton—building a castle in Spain the while, which resembled the fabled milk-maid's with her pot of milk—"no earthly reason why at

some future time I should not represent the place. Let me see—I am just forty, and young for my age, and a fine figure of a man, all things considered. I mean to write and make a name, and I shall be still in my prime at fifty-five. By that time the four children may be educated and off our hands. The boys may take my place in the practice from which I shall have retired, and as to the girls they will probably marry into county families. Jenny has a wonderful knack of making influential friends, I am already beginning to lay by some nest-eggs, I shall look for good investments, and then—with my interest with all parties—let me see, I shall call myself Liberal-Conservative, that takes with everyone, and I may trust Jenny—bless her heart—for getting votes, no one can resist her.”

Already he was rehearsing his speech on the hustings, when his attention was drawn to his horse, which needed to be guided carefully round a difficult turning of the street. His face was still radiant

with happiness, and the expression of self-satisfaction which was usually subdued, was more dominant than usual, when his eye fell on the figure of a man, who appeared to be coming rapidly towards him. An unusual-looking man dressed in a coat trimmed with sealskin, and a foreign-looking fur hat drawn over his brows. A man whose spare, well-built frame gave him the appearance of greater height than he actually possessed, and whose thin features, weather-beaten, leathery complexion, and expression of unusual melancholy gave him something of the appearance of an Indian Fakir.

At the sight of him George Gathorne suddenly started, and almost let the reins fall from his hands, grew paler and paler, till he became absolutely livid, and the great drops of perspiration stood on his forehead. Only a sense of personal danger through the stumbling of his horse recalled him to the necessity for presence of mind, when, with a sharp application

of his whip he succeeded in clearing the corner of the street, and looking round again for the apparition which had so singularly excited him, saw no more of it than if it had never existed.

“Melted into thin air—gone!” he muttered to himself as he proceeded nervously on his way, “like the ghost in Hamlet! what an idiot I am to be fooled by my senses. I suppose it must be what they call an optical delusion. My digestion must be out of sorts, I must consult Haden about it.”

Yet it was noticed, when Gathorne reached the Guildhall that day, that he was not himself, that he started at slight noises, that his hand shook strangely, and that the wisdom which consisted in his want of words, and which was a part of his usual diplomacy, was carried to so great an extent that he only answered in monosyllables.

Coming away from the Town Council, he was followed by a friend who tucked his arm into the lawyer's, and—declaring



that Middle Hampton was fast becoming revolutionary, and that all who worked for the good of the place were sure to be hated like Aristides, and to get the lash from some ungrateful person or other—asked him after a little more beating about of the bush, if he had heard of the abominable anonymous letters, which were being circulated at his expense, letters which advised the other Members of the Town Council to inquire into the lawyer's antecedents, and to elect no man to be Mayor of Middle Hampton who could not come out of such an inquiry with clean hands.

“I thought it better to let you know exactly what was going on — though, of course, we none of us attach any importance to such inuendoes. Who cares for the hitting in the dark of a cowardly anonymous letter?” continued his informant, who noticed that George Gathorne was becoming strangely white, and that the veins on his large forehead were starting into unusual prominence. “The less

such mean attacks are considered the better. Only I thought you would like to be well up in all that was going on."

"To be sure! Some of us when we do our duty must expect to be personally unpopular—but I thank Heaven I have no need to make a *tabula rasa* of my past life," answered Gathorne in a rasping voice, as if he were struggling against huskiness, and devoutly wishing that he had the conversational talent of his refined and witty wife.

"Of course! I wish we could get hold of the offenders and punish 'em—you would threaten them with the awful lightnings of the law—another Jove, armed with thunderbolts effulgent and terrible," said his companion, who felt that he had made a mess of it with his uncomfortable communication, and that it would be better to laugh off that something more behind the scenes which he began to suspect, and as yet imperfectly comprehended. "Have we not all known you for years—man and boy?" he added. "Rogues who

make such infamous accusations should be punished like felons. I call it downright barbarous, almost as bad as murderous."

And Gathorne, left to himself, turned instinctively to the nearest pastry-cook's. The old habit of keeping up his dignity deterred him from going into a public-house. That very morning, he remembered, he had been caught up to the empyrean, and though he began to feel that he might have to come down to the level of ordinary humanity, his self-abasement was not yet so great that he cared to be seen in his present unnerved—not to say terrified—mood, drinking brandy at his club. So he consoled himself with cherry-brandy, which he consumed in large quantities in a private room at the pastry-cook's; after which he concluded that the tendencies of the age were iconoclastic and subversive—that no man could expect to achieve a success without being hated, that to be a prophet in one's own country was, of course, a little difficult

and that, as to his past, no human creature was acquainted with its secrets but one—*himself*. Any other hypothesis was dismissed as absurd, childish, and contemptible, the mere dream of a distempered imagination.

“Can the sea give up its dead?” he asked himself in scorn; “or can a man who is leathery and emaciated as a Trappist, bear anything but an imaginary resemblance to one who was stout and ruddy-faced?”

As to the anonymous letters, he dismissed them from his memory.

“Jealousy and confounded spite!” he muttered to himself, as he prepared to drive back to the “Laurels.” He decided to say nothing about these annoyances to Jenny, whose lively talk and pretty face would clear the cobwebs from his brain. But that evening, when his little ones were climbing about his knees, and when the sight of a luxurious drawing-room, resplendent in its way with upholstery, papier-maché chairs, showy pictures and

mirrors, had helped to restore his sense of security and prosperity—he was told that a gentleman wished to speak to him on business—a pressing matter of great importance—and was waiting for him in his library.

“Why on earth did you show the fellow in? How often I have told you I can see no one at this hour,” he inquired, a little fiercely, till smoothed down by soft words and encomiums from Jenny—who could see nothing in this late visit but another compliment to her husband’s talents, a fresh suffrage added to the unanimity of the verdict which society had already pronounced on George Gathorne’s legal skill—he became less inimical.

“They won’t let me have any rest,” he still answered a little crossly. “I see them in my office in the day, and that should be sufficient.”

“Dear, I would give him just five minutes, if it is a question of such importance, and get him to make an appointment for to-morrow. It is troublesome to

have to work so hard as you work; but you were not made for lotus-eating, you would not be happy if you were idle," answered the low-toned voice, which Shakespeare long ago decreed to be "an excellent thing in woman."

So with his ruffled feathers smoothed, and his nerves quieted by a cup of tea, but still with a latent determination to consult his doctor on the morrow as to the fluttering of his heart, and the hurried beating of his pulse, the master of the house proceeded to the library with the solemn look of a man who was accustomed to hear the confessions of his clients.

His visitor did not rise to meet him, but inclined himself slightly, as—muffled in a large cloak—he remained seated in the arm-chair. The lower part of his face was almost entirely hidden from view by an unusual profusion of thick whisker, dark beard and moustache, whilst the forehead was also covered with a mass of iron-grey hair. But something in the expression of the eyes made George Gathorne uncomfort-

able. Unconsciously his thoughts recurred to the nightmare of the morning, and he thought of a great-coat trimmed with sealskin, and of other eyes which had made him wince, repeating to himself, "I must certainly send for Haden to-morrow."

"I have altered my usual rule," he said aloud, with an air that was more self-assertive and masterful than usual, "in seeing you at this hour. But I was told that you were very urgent, and I do not like to refuse cases in which every moment is of consequence. I can give you a few minutes, and if you will supply me with the main features—to-morrow——"

"A few minutes will be sufficient," answered the visitor in a voice which again made Gathorne's troublesome heart beat tumultuously, for, though the voice feigned hoarseness, there was a ring in it which could not be disguised, and with which he seemed to be strangely familiar. "The case lies in a nutshell. I have to consult you about a naval officer—supposed to

have died years ago, who—before starting on a voyage of some difficulty—blinded and rendered imprudent by the greatness of his anxiety as to the welfare of his only child, confided all his fortune, consisting of four thousand pounds, to the care of a faithless friend, for his daughter. It was against the advice of his own lawyer who told him he had better have confided the girl to a man who was a stranger to him. But this naval fool was mad enough to trust the promises of a hypocritical, sneaking landsman. In the life of a sailor, which had exposed him to all perils and fatigues, he had led an existence so isolated and cut off from his kind, that—installed from his very boyhood in the prison of a ship—he had nursed his simple faith in the goodness of human nature. He had married before he was twenty years old, and too late had recognised the fact that a man of his profession had no right to marry. Once before he had been obliged to embark at a few days' notice, and to leave without a murmur



his newly married wife, and his child—which had just seen the light. He came back years afterwards, and his wife was dead. He was a widower with that one child—a pretty little maid on whom he doated. And when called away again, the poor wretch had a horror of the chances which might prove fatal to him—the chances that had nearly proved fatal more than once.”

Exasperated by his own reflections, the speaker looked at his listener, who sat trembling and pale, with the veins on his forehead again starting into prominence; and then he continued more violently:

“I see the story is not new to you—you can finish it yourself. You know how the vessel in which the poor devil sailed was reported to be wrecked, and it was said that all hands were lost. He was not heard of for years—but no inquiries were made about him, and, meanwhile, his delicate girl was got—like a nuisance—out of the way to some mismanaged kitten-house, kept by a couple of old cats—

over-crowded and badly-drained, as such schools are apt to be, till fever broke out in it, and murdered the innocents. She was not moved at once, but left to sicken of typhoid—left to die like a dog, from the neglect of ordinary precautions—and—ah, I see you know the rest—her guardian *profited by her death*, and by the absence of a settlement, or a living witness of the gift. He never inquired for the next of kin, but he *appropriated the money*, and neither angel nor devil interfered to see that he was punished for his cruelty, but he flourished on his theft and waxed fat on his fraud.”

He raised his voice at the last words, and towering to his full height, stood like an accusing spirit over George Gathorne.

The lawyer did not rise but made an effort to speak. A fugitive colour appeared on his pale cheeks, and he coughed a little dry cough, and passed his hand between his collar and his neck, as if he had a difficulty in breathing.

“Ah, you are slowly strangling, are

you? but the punishment of the gallows would be too good for such as *you!*” said the accuser, with a hoarse laugh, as he still towered over him, with a look of acrid hate, and tore away the false hair with which he had hitherto disguised his features. “I would rather ten times that you should *live*, that the world should be made hot for you, and that you should endure the full torments of the worm of your own conscience. I know nothing about the other world, but I will make sure of you in this! So you thought that I was dead, did you? As if you didn’t know that the life in me would hold out till I had taken my revenge—and Mark Eylmer was not the man to be easily drowned. I daresay you wish I was lying ‘full fathom five,’” he continued, with the same unnatural laughter, “and ‘that coral was made of my bones, and pearls of my eyes.’ I remember how fond you were of quoting poetry when we two were young, and some of the stuff still lingers in my memory. But you were out

in your calculations for once, my sentimental friend—you never thought of the boats—or of Mark Eylmer's swimming powers—never remembered that there were such things as out-of-the-way islands where an Englishman, who knew a trick or two, might lie hidden for a time—to come back when he was least expected, and claim his pound of flesh. That, too, was in your Shakespeare, and it is *my* turn to quote it. 'I claim the law, the penalty and forfeit of my bond,'” he added, laughing still.

The strange laughter seemed to arouse a little spirit in George Gathorne, who passing and repassing his hand over his brow, as if he hoped by that method to calm his brain, and pressing his hand on his heart, and on his wrist, as if he would feel the action of his pulse, said in a broken voice,

“This violence will kill me! You are mistaken if you think I could have done anything to prevent the death of your daughter—no one regretted that unhappy

event more than I did. But she was never strong, and I did not hear of the fever—I assure you I did not—till it had actually broken out—you are mistaken—if you think—I could have done anything more for her. No one will believe these infamous accusations.”

Mark Eylmer smiled ironically.

“Let us see what folks will believe; I have promised to make the place hot for you, and I have begun already! Your character is as good as gone—and as to your money—I have said I will have my pound of flesh cut off nearest the heart, but as I don’t believe you have it to give just at present, I will take it by degrees. When I met you in London, you had a struggle for your daily bread; I had heard you say so, and yet you were engaged to be married, and could not afford to marry. Fool that I was, to think nothing of the temptation I was placing in the way of a weak, contemptible idiot like yourself, when I heard you in maundering strains deplore your own poverty! I thought

only of my child. I did not know how long I should be absent from England, and I wished you to have ready money at any time to help her. She was too young for me to place a large sum at her disposal—and so I placed it with *you*—the sum, as you remember, of four thousand pounds—I have your acknowledgment of it still in my keeping. Through all my wanderings I never lost it—though you hoped that it was drowned with me in the depths of the sea. You knew that to realise this sum I had sold land which I possessed. Ah, how well I remember, how you stammered and hesitated—afraid, perhaps, of your own weakness, and persuaded me that such money-transactions were too delicate to be entrusted to the care of one person. And how I believed in you—how I honoured your fine motives! and in my dotage, disregarded the warning of my own man of business, who also told me how unwise it was to place the whole of my little fortune at the discretion of a friend. ‘You must have wonderful con-

fidence in him,' he said, and I answered that I had unbounded confidence, and that the particular circumstances would be too long for me to explain."

George Gathorne did not answer. Now that the tone of mocking irony had passed out of Eylmer's voice, and that the peculiar timbre in it, with which he had been so familiar in past days, thrilled reproachfully through him, he looked away from him, and sat with his head bent on his bosom. The germ of a conscience which he had long since stifled, was awakened in him again, and none of the safe platitudes which on past occasions he had uttered with unction, came readily to his lips as he let Mark continue without remonstrance or interruption.

"You have sunk nearly all the money. I do not need to be told so—you could not be living in your present style—you could not have married the penniless girl you were in love with ten years ago, if you had not sunk it. Well, I will be more generous to you than you deserve—I will

not grind you into powder all at once," he added, with the sardonic laugh of feverish excitement, which made George Gathorne cower and shrink; "I will let you linger in slower tortures for the sake of old times. The pound of flesh must accumulate before I claim the whole of it. Half the money—two thousand pounds—I must have in a week from this day, but I will wait for the remaining two thousand for ten years.

"Five years after that—if both of us are living—I will demand the interest of my money, five hundred pounds or more. So that you see you will never be free of me till the whole of the sum is paid by instalments. I shall be like one of the ghouls we used to talk of in our boyish days, the vampires who would have pleased the morbid imagination of your favourite Shelley—returning at stated periods to suck your blood. And during the whole of the intervening time I shall keep my eye on you, that no other man may be deceived as I have been in you. When-



ever the cup you have most coveted is being lifted to your lips, a secret hand will dash it away from you. Wherever you may go, a voice will follow you—a voice which will whisper, ‘Beware of him, there is a story in his past—he is a traitor and a swindler!’

“You will be unable to defend yourself. You will let the accusations pass, and people will draw their own inferences. But you will be too much of a lawyer to dare to face the consequences of self-defence, for you will remember all those years that I have proofs against you, and that there is nothing I should like better than to get you into a witness-box. Ah! the thumbscrew and the rack could not rival the torture which you will feel when, instead of your greedy struggle for place, even the appearance of honour will be taken away from you, and your name will be a hissing and a reproach.”

During the course of this last speech, the utterance of the unexpected visitor had become louder and more rapid. There

was such a grim humour about his threats, uttered in a deepening chest voice, which seemed like a caricature of the pleasant voice of past days, and such a mocking expression in his angry face, which, with its hard lines and parchment skin, appeared like a hideous mummy of the face he had known long ago, that Gathorne found himself wondering helplessly if he were not in some strange nightmare, which had been possibly conjured up by his own accusing conscience.

He sat patiently in his anguish, with the drops of moisture on his brow, but appearing almost unconscious of the sounds which reached his ears, and determining not to mutter in answer that he had actually hardly any balance at his banker's; when the door was suddenly flung open, and a little blonde girl—unconscious that her father was engaged at this hour, peeped merrily into the room, and cried in a silvery voice,

“Papa!”

He had just sufficient presence of mind

to frown her into silence, and the child, who, on account of her unusual beauty, had been her father's pet since the day when he had first watched her tottering efforts to walk across her nursery-floor, ran out of the room alarmed, slamming the door behind her, and unconsciously divining that something unusual was the matter.

But the apparition produced another change in the varying moods of the visitor. He leant his head on the table, and there was a sound like a sob as he gasped, ceasing his bantering tone,

“Do you not see the likeness? The same golden hair; the same blue eyes and white arms—the little arms that used to cling so tenderly round my neck—and yet Heaven, they say, is just, and still, *my* child has gone, and *yours* is left! What offence had I committed when I said in my guileless youth ‘I shall have a wife to love me,’ and then, when she was gone, ‘God is merciful. He has left me a little one to comfort me!’

My *one* little ewe lamb who was to have repaid me for all my toil, when she grew up—to die alone, of a fever which could have been prevented. And *you*—the cursed scoundrel,” he added with a terrible oath, “who neglected her, and proved unfaithful to the most sacred of all trusts—it seems that all the good things in life, forsooth, are to fall to *your* share—you are to have everything—wife—children—prosperity! But I will prevent it. I have you in my power! May the curse of a broken-hearted man light on everything belonging to you! May that child’s happiness be blighted, and the happiness of everyone belonging to you. May——”

George Gathorne lifted his hands deprecatingly, entreatingly. He could not speak, even when his former friend continued in answer to his feeble gesture.

“You would have me spare you and yours, but did you spare *me*? You have not even the flimsiest excuse to make for yourself. I see it all plain enough.

To allow my child to live single, or to be married, when you thought I was dead, was to hand the sum of money which you coveted to another. You did not exactly kill her, but you placed her in circumstances which you knew were unfit for one of her delicate constitution and which would kill her by inches. You deceived me and abandoned my guileless little one. Oh! it was cleverly contrived by you—very cleverly—the devil himself could not have managed it much more cleverly. And now I have come back—too late—too late!”

He buried his face in his hands. To say that George Gathorne glanced at him with a pang at his heart, which was almost like a death-pang in its concentrated agony, was hardly to exaggerate what he felt as he looked at him, for he knew that a stranger could scarcely have supposed it to be possible for one human being to be so much attached to another as this father had been to the little girl with the fair golden head, whom years before he had

seen laid in her coffin. Then more personal considerations came into play.

"You are mad!" he tried to utter, but the words died on his lips. It was useless for him to argue any longer on the question, for it was evident that his excited visitor could not listen to rational argument. And though this burst of natural passion had made his superstitious fears cease, though he no longer thought of the possibility of an evil spirit taking upon itself the likeness of a human body long since dead, still things could not be more desperate with him than they were at that moment

He heard the words repeated, "I will return within a week," and thought of the difficulty of realising the sum of two thousand pounds. He, whose style of living had lately imposed on the credulous Middle Hamptonians had, as he remembered, but a small margin at his banker's. He looked round at his furniture, and recognised for the first time, that there was nothing very original or

unique about it. He glanced at the pictures on which he had prided himself, and recollected how a truthful friend, who had travelled a good deal, had but lately shrugged his shoulders discouragingly at them. The words which he had almost forgotten, rang again in his ears,

“I don’t want to offend you; but they have not half the value you attribute to them. I see painted canvases—but pictures—no. Excuse me, you are not an artist, and you have been taken in—your Berghem is false—and your Cuyp is false—but I don’t see that it much matters, as you have no idea of selling them”

He thought of the horse and carriage, and the villa which he should have to sell—of the baneful reports which he should be unable to contradict—of the injury to his pride and his future prospects; and determined to give up his practice and leave Middle Hampton.

And as he heard the retreating footsteps of his visitor, the furniture and pictures

on which he had been gazing, seemed to dance before his eyes. The table on which he had been leaning reeled, the ceiling seemed to be coming down, the floor gave way beneath his feet, and the walls advanced as if to crush him in. He could have screamed aloud for help, but his wife was in the next room, and more than anything at that moment he dreaded facing his wife. All his senses seemed to be intensified so that he heard the hall-door gently close, but the sensation of choking from which he had been suffering, increased. He could no longer struggle against it, and fell at last heavily forward, with a sound which alarmed Mrs. Gathorne and her maid-servants, who hurried panic-stricken into the room to find the master in a fainting fit.



## Book I.

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### CHAPTER I.

**A**BOUT fourteen years afterwards on a Sunday morning early in August, a traveller who had arrived in London on the previous evening, sat at his late breakfast in the Great Western Hotel, looking as if he were fatigued and disgusted with life. A few other men and women who had lounged into the room glanced at him more than once, for he was an unusually handsome man, of a type not often seen, and the expression of dissatisfaction which he had assumed did not appear to be natural to him. Apparently he was not more than five or six-and-twenty—too young to be misanthropical. Theoretically,

he should have been a petted Antinous—a nineteenth century Adonis, accustomed to be made much of by women, and to return their petting with compassionate attentions and smiling condescensions. And yet, if other people looked at him, he never returned their glances, and there was certainly an unusual melancholy in the expression of the face—of which an art critic had once remarked that it resembled a head by Masaccio, so finely cut were the nostrils, and so lofty the brow. His manner and action were languid, and when he spoke, the tone and modulation of the voice were exactly of a piece, and so peculiarly his own that though they bordered on the lackadaisical, they could not have been compared to Lord Dunderbary's fashionable affectation, or copied from any original in the whole or in any part.

“Disappointed in love!” remarked a young matron with womanly sympathy.

“More likely a misogynist or a roué, who has had his fling on the Continent,

and is reaping the consequences—not pleasant ones,” laughed her husband, also in *sotto voce*; “my experience has taught me that those interesting fellows are generally no better than they should be, though you women are apt to be so soft about them.”

“A case of *mal de mer*,” concluded another more matter-of-fact observer, “his complexion looks as if he were sea-sick still.”

Meanwhile, the object of these comments, unconscious and indifferent, sat toying with his breakfast. The sound of church bells fell unheeded on his ears. The tea and coffee were untouched, the rashers of bacon were looked at with contempt, and the egg which he had broken was scarcely eaten, when he rose, looked at his watch, decided that appetite would come later, and that, meanwhile, he would kill time by paying a visit to his doctor.

The doctor, who was carrying on a flourishing practice in a fashionable quar-

ter of the town, lived in a well-known thoroughfare, where his brass plate appeared on the street-door.

But he knew the weaknesses of humanity, and had provided his house with another door—an unpretending side entrance in a little back street—where the men of the world, or the sick lions who wished to consult him, could do it on the sly, without fear of being found out. To this back-door our traveller directed his languid footsteps, and was told that Dr. Harper would be in at half-past twelve.

It wanted but three quarters of an hour to the time appointed, and Randal Stanton sauntered in, and was shown into a private room, where he tried to occupy himself with the “Daily News,” or the “Pall-Mall” of Saturday evening, ignoring the more orthodox Sunday diet, which had been prepared to suit different palates, and which was represented by the “Guardian” and a few books of theology, ostentatiously arranged on an adjacent table. The words of the newspapers swam before his eyes,

and during the forty-five minutes in which he was alone, he started more than once, looked suspiciously at the darker corners of the room, shook himself as out of a dream, rose to his feet and then sat down again, or walked in a rapid pace once or twice towards the window.

At half-past twelve precisely, he was not sorry to have these fidgety gymnastics interrupted by the sound of a well-known footstep, and to have his reverie broken in upon by the cheery voice of the punctual doctor.

“Well, Stanton, my boy—what have you been doing to yourself? I expected you to look like a young man who had seen life. But one would think from the appearance of you, that there were ghosts at Homburg? Has the place disappointed you that you are back so soon, and have escaped so easily from the clutches of Paul De Lafarges?”

“He had nothing to do with it—I liked Homburg well enough. But something happened last month, which gave me a

bit of a turn. I can't shake off the effects of it. I can't sleep at night—I suppose my nerves must have been on the stretch already.”

“Not a doubt of it with that unfortunate propensity to gaming—and the excitement of every season—if you were as sound as a bell you could not stand it. How an Oxford graduate, who went in for honours, could condescend to so degrading a pursuit, is more than I could ever understand! I knew that fellow with the long name would never have done with you till he had plucked your remaining feathers, take my word for it,—you had better have been thrown in with Mephistopheles himself, than with a false and officious friend like that pretended cynic.”

“De Lafarges had nothing to do with it, and I'm not one of the goslings from whom the fluff could be stripped,” repeated the young man sulkily. “I had my turn of luck as well as Paul—sometimes winning and sometimes losing, for though

you may not remember it, I am as fledged as he is."

"With the losses much more frequent than the gains," broke in the doctor with a shrug.

"More frequent if you will—but that did not much matter, it was the chances of war. It was not only the gaming I cared for. The scenery of the place pleased me, and everything is admirably conducted."

"Did not much matter! Hear him!" echoed the Doctor, "I am not a mathematician as he is! I did not come out in honours! But a fellow need not breakfast on logarithms or sup on equations to help him to find out that if an unfortunate wretch loses more than he wins, and the experiment is constantly repeated, the whole of his little patrimony will speedily disappear."

"There isn't much of it left already," answered Stanton with a feeble laugh. "But my turn of good fortune might have come if I had waited long enough."

I had the picking of a few stray plumes at times, I as well as Lafarges—who knows but I might have become as rich as Rothschild! Well—and if there was no chance of it, nature which made me a rover, made me what you call gambler at the same time, and I couldn't help it! I have not come to consult you about my morals—or to get a sermon gratis to-day. I tell you I have had a shock—an accident which has bothered me so that I thought it better to come to London and have medical advice."

"The advice I will give you just now, my boy, is to come with me and have your lunch," answered his friend with undisturbed good-humour. "You are suffering from exhaustion. There is a weakness about you, a general poverty of blood—I can see that at a glance. I daresay you think yourself a handsome fellow, but look at the thinness of your hair, the colour of your finger-nails. Oh—ah, you will say that *my* nails are plebeian. Granted—but if a fellow has



blue blood in his veins he need not be anæmic. You want rest, and you must have it. When you have taken some soup and wine we will talk at leisure over your difficulty, for there is scarcely a soul in town just now. All the world and its wife are abroad or at the sea-side, and I can give you plenty of time. Though under any circumstances your mother's son would be sure of my first attention."

At lunch the keen Doctor kept his eye on his guest. He ate heartily himself like a man who had earned his meal, and had the digestion of an ostrich; but he had time to notice Stanton breaking his bread with the tips of his fingers, sending his beef steak and oysters away scarcely tasted, and continually moistening his lips with the wine.

When the hasty meal was ended, and the two men were left alone to talk, Harper heard Randal's story; how a poor Hungarian who had been losing heavily, shot himself, close to Stanton, at a gaming-table but a few weeks before.

"The scene is still before my eyes," he said, "I must be out of sorts not to get over it. But the shot was close to my very ear, and when I turned sharply round, there was the poor wretch covered with blood—half on the chair which he had pushed away from him, and half on the ground. The expression on his face was fifty times worse than the blood. It has stamped itself on my memory so that I see it when my eyes are shut. And though the croupiers never left their places, and the officials took it as a matter of course, and tried to make out the next day that the creature was an impostor—the thing spoke for itself. A fellow who fires a blank cartridge to get up a hubbub is not likely to stream with blood, or to look like one of Doré's illustrations of Dante's *Inferno*. Pah—it was the women who disgusted me most! One or two of them left their play; but most of them only looked scandalised, and recovered their spirits in about half-an-hour. I must be

made of miserably weak stuff to be so much more shocked than they were. But the poor devil who had the wretched bad taste to blow out his brains in public, haunts me. I can't get rid of him. My pulse is quick, and my heart beats. There are nights in which I am not able to sleep without an opiate."

"It is a serious matter," said the Doctor gravely; "I told you how it would be with you—you are not a long-lived man, and if you persist in this exciting life—"

"Why, longevity they say is hereditary, and my father was younger than I am at the age of seventy."

"He thought himself so, no doubt; for when you were born, and I had the honour of assisting at that important ceremony, he complained to me that it would make him look old to be a family man. He was fifty then, if he was a day, but he, in common with yourself, had the misfortune of being what is considered an Adonis. He spent days in admiring

himself which he should have given to his wife, and with the assistance of the hairdresser, and other adepts in the deceptive arts, he managed to hang a few veils before the hour-glass of Time. But the sands ran out all the same, and when I attended him at the age of seventy, he was rotten to the very core. No, my friend, you have been 'going too fast' already, but you have time to pull up; and I would rather see you in your coffin than have you follow the precedent of your father! You inherit his appearance, but you have your mother's constitution, and she, you remember, did not take much killing. She was no beauty, but she was a Griselda in the nineteenth century—a heroine—a martyr. She ought to have married some one strong and true like herself, but she knew how to reconcile humility and truth to a nicety. She should have been a little more self-assertive, it would have done your father a world of good," added the good man with increasing heat, and a

break in his honest voice, "but ill-treatment could not crush the real nobility of her nature. Some women are like Spartans; they will hide the fox that gnaws their vitals, and arrange their drapery with smiling faces, to cover the wounds in their broken hearts. Your mother was one of them—she never uttered a murmur. Your father never heard a complaint from *her* lips. She bore neglect without repining, but Heaven helped her—she died! And the last words she said to me as I stood by her death-bed, were, 'If you ever have the opportunity, try to influence my son!'"

The Doctor paused, and looked at Randal. For he had a keen instinct of character, and he knew that his evident emotion had communicated itself to his listener.

For the few instants which followed, both men were silent, till Stanton said, with the faintest little movement of his shoulders,

"You think this warning will be of any

use to me—you have known me from my childhood, and you are generous enough to believe in the good in me still ?”

“ I believe in potentialities of good in every man till they are rendered abortive by his own weakness, and you are not an utter weakling,” answered Dr. Harper, a little sternly.

“ As I said before, you are generous,” answered the younger man, flushing ; “ but you are surely mistaken in thinking I inherit my mother’s constitution. She died of decline, but there is nothing serious the matter with *me*—only a shock to the nervous system, and a general feeling of uneasiness which does not improve.”

“ And a loss of appetite—a loss of tone. Do you remember what I told you when I saw you last time ?”

“ Before I left England,” was the evasive answer. “ Doctor, don’t repeat it. I will swallow drugs, however nauseous. I will perform proper penance, and wear a hair shirt if you please. But

I cannot live according to your dictatorial rules. To rise early is impossible to me ; I would sooner cut my throat. And as to confining myself to mutton-chops, I would rather have work-house diet."

"I did not say mutton-chops ; I said plain diet, fresh air, regular exercise, and early hours, and I say so still. I have nothing more to tell you. Go to a quack if you will, but *I* cannot prescribe for you, simply because all the remedies in the pharmacopœia can do nothing in the world for you. Submit to what you please to call my régime—though the rules are not mine, they are simply the laws of Nature—or take the consequences from which I cannot screen you. You will have no need to cut your throat, for you will *die* !"

"You are joking," said his listener, whose statuesque face suddenly flushed till it became rudely coloured, and then faded to an ashy paleness.

"I am not joking ; I never was in more sober earnest. You come to me for my

advice and I enlighten you. You must lead a simple, every-day life, and it is very easy for you to do it. Break off with Paul de Lafarges, as you would break off with the devil incarnate; avoid him as you would leprosy. Forget that you know how to touch a card, or that you were ever a good hand at billiards. These things may cause innocent enjoyment to some people, but *your* pleasure in them has ceased to be innocent, and may at any time prove fatal. It is an enjoyment to a good many men to get drunk, and to commit suicide by delirium tremens—you have not yet descended to that vice, but you are committing suicide in another way, and by a more subtle form of poison. Give it up. Form new ties. Keep your runnings clear for the future. Marry a woman like your mother. Go and live at Llandyffryn—at the old house which your mother left you. Many a man might be envious of you.”



"The place is as dull as ditch-water."

"Not a bit of it. Caerwyn was a sweet woman's home; there ought to be associations about the place. And supposing that you have run through the rest of your property; mind, I don't inquire about your extravagances—still the house and grounds at Llandyffryn, with the little income you have left you, ought to suffice for every reasonable want."

"I'm a hopelessly bad man of business," answered Randal, with his French shrug; "still I take it that when I have cleared off old scores, there may be about enough left to pay for the mutton-chops and cold water."

"Again I can enlighten you! When you have paid off the old scores, you will have an independent income left of about six hundred a year, comfortably lodged in the Consols. You know that your mother made me one of the trustees, and it was partly by my advice that she tied the property up in such a

manner that you could not touch the capital."

"A beggar's pittance!" muttered Randal, "to say nothing of the enforced exile."

"A first-rate sanatorium," answered the Doctor rising, "with plenty to live upon for Wales. Talk of the climate of Homburg or Baden or Monaco—why, the air of Llandyffryn is like nectar—clear, pure, reviving, invigorating—it will make a new man of you in no time; and as to the scenery, not one of your foreign watering-places is fit to hold a candle to it."

\* \* \* \*

About a week after this conversation with Dr. Harper, Randal, having submitted himself to the inevitable, was looking gloomily out of the window of a first-class railway-carriage, on the first stage of his journey to his Siberia in North Wales. He travelled first-class from habit, though he preached to himself

economy—economy, with all its uninviting angularities. But though he looked out of the window, he paid no heed to the prospect.

His head was full of the hard matter-of-fact advice on which he had had time to ponder. He was thinking of the pathetic story of his mother; and of the other women whom he had known—the women he had met in bad sets at Homburg, Baden, or Monaco—the painted girls, the married flirts, the cunning adventurers, and he loathed them in his secret thoughts, and was hard on them in his heart.

“No wonder they called me a misogynist,” he thought with a creeping sensation of the flesh caused by his jaundiced state of mind. “The Doctor might grapple with me for ever, and he always has the best of it with his arguments, but I could never marry one of those Delilahs — pah! their *œillades* — their poses! If I have health and strength restored to me, and if I settle at Llan-

dyffryn, I will marry a woman like my mother—I will not look out for beauty; but I will make a good solid marriage with a girl who is unexceptionable, who has never been fast, who has never been talked about, but is spotless as Cæsar's wife. A girl who, if she is a mother, will set a good example to my children."

It was easy enough for him to form these virtuous resolutions. For, whether it was as he affectedly called it, his "kismet," his conceit, or his belief in his own invulnerability, he had never been what is popularly called in love.

He had chosen to vary his route to North Wales, so that at Hereford he had an hour and a half to spare, and having nothing else to do, he sauntered towards the Cathedral, where the organist happened to be practising one of Bach's wonderful fugues. At first the voluntary only seemed to him like a chaotic clatter of sound, but at last it began to assume a more definite meaning. He

was in a softened mood, with his good impulses in the ascendant, and as he looked at the exquisite architecture, and listened to the rhythm of the music, the joint influence seemed to carry him upwards to a higher and nobler life.

When he returned to the station there was still a quarter of an hour to wait, and as he paced up and down the platform, his eye was caught by a group of young girls of ages, varying from thirteen to eighteen, who seemed to be taking an affectionate leave of one member of their party, who was apparently a few years older than themselves.

"No doubt they belong to some school at Hereford, and that is one of the teachers whom they are purring over," he said, a little less cynically than usual, as, passing and repassing them, he overheard the words,

"He can't want you half so badly as we do. I am always in scrapes since you left us—we miss you terribly, Grannie."

The speaker was a pretty girl with a clear brunette complexion, and slightly aquiline nose, but Randal Stanton always prided himself on caring nothing for pretty girls, and only reflected as he looked at her, that this little maiden with sparkling eyes, whose words were so caressing, would be certain to have "nut-crackers" if she lived to be old.

But the odd appellation of "Grannie," struck him as something novel, and he looked critically at the supposed governess, who submitted quietly to the nickname.

"Certainly she does her best to make herself look like a grandmother," he reflected. "I never saw such a queer get-up in my life. I wonder what the Russian Princess at Homburg, or the Polish Countess, as she called herself—I daresay she was only an adventuress picked out of the gutter—would say to that stiff dress and remarkable head-gear. *They* never condescended to put on anything but handsome, stylish things; I really

wonder what they would think of this quaint little English girl, who makes up her own economical millinery, I suppose to save the dress-maker's bill. Well, there ought to be some character about her—she must be out of the common groove, for I never yet knew a woman who was not devoted to dress."

His lips curved into something which resembled a smile, so much was his fancy tickled by the old-fashioned looking bonnet, which gave the wearer something of a conventual appearance.

"Why doesn't she wear a hat," he thought, "like other people?"

And then for the first time he looked at the face which was half-shadowed by the bonnet, and noticed that the features were not classical, and that their want of regularity was not redeemed by any glory of colouring—but that the complexion was clear and healthy, and that there was an unusually sweet expression in the soft serious grey eyes, which were shaded by eyelashes brown as the hair.

“Not beautiful,” he thought, “but good—*like my mother*. Pale, and perfectly natural! Not a bit like that mad-cap Countess, who caused such a *furor* at Homburg, but who would not be seen, even by her adorers, without the light of wax-candles, or with daylight carefully subdued by the shade of pink-hued curtains, which she always carried about with her in those big trunks that blocked up the passages. Faugh! it makes me sick to think of it, how that woman starred it in public, how one man carried her fan for her, another her smelling-bottle, and another her pocket-handkerchief, and how she displayed her hands and feet because they happened to be small, and racked her far smaller brains for sugar-plums to throw to the puppies, in the form of contemptible exaggerations. No doubt,” he added with his characteristic shrug, and a relapse into his misanthropy, “no doubt it was a very pretty theory of the Doctor’s that I should go like another Adam into a second Paradise, with an Eve who should



satisfy my desires for companionship. But he did not know how thoroughly I had ceased to believe in women. The Welsh paradise will be a horrid cold one—and as to the Eve—well, if I could meet with the gold or diamond which need fear nothing from chemical analysis, instead of the paste or pinchbeck, it might be another matter—if I could meet for instance, with a woman *like my mother.*”

And again he raised his eyes and gave another searching glance at the quiet face, which was so saturated with expression that he was beginning to be almost reconciled to the oddness of the coiffure. He remembered how he had once been told by an old fashioned cynic that a certain bewitching, retiring style of modest womanly countenance had apparently disappeared altogether with the bonnet of former times, and that when the ladies of the present generation could be satisfied that they had ostentatiously exposed enough of their faces, and more than enough of their hair, there might be a

hope that the true bonnet might re-establish its reign, with all the tantalising attraction of half-hidden beauties.

“My mother,” he reflected, “of course, wore the old-fashioned bonnet, by which a woman could vary the profile view of her face through a series of moon-like phases. I wonder if my mother’s face was at all like that girl’s.”

His soliloquy was interrupted by the shrill sound of the whistle announcing the approaching train; and at the same moment his eyes fell on a little wooden box placed on the platform close to the group of girls, with the simple direction,

*M. Gathorne.*

*Llandyffryn.*

He started, for since the accident which had affected his nerves, he had become a little superstitious, and he thought the coincidence an odd one, though there was no time to reflect upon it. The train was already rushing with a shrill scream up to the platform. The protracted talk of the

girls was ended, and after a few more embraces, "Grannie" was soon seated comfortably in a second-class carriage.

"It must be my last visit for a very long time. He wants me at home you know, and poor little Steenie wants me. I know you will not grudge me to them," she said, leaning with a beaming smile out of the carriage window, as her umbrella and warm shawls were being handed to her by her companions.

There were two other passengers in the same carriage. Randal Stanton looked at them for a moment, and then, without stopping to think of the absurdity of his sudden impulse, he stepped without a moment's hesitation also into the carriage. It was the first time he had ever travelled second-class in his life, and as soon as the whistle sounded and the train was in motion, he began to think he had made a fool of himself, and to repent his rash resolution. With characteristic self-consciousness, he caught himself won-

dering if the quaint little country girl was not a good deal astonished at this strange move of his, and if it did not have a comical appearance to see so good-looking a swell sitting next to a farmer's wife, and close to another man with a white neck-tie, who looked like a rather vulgar Dissenting minister, in a second-class carriage.

But apparently the "quaint little girl" thought nothing at all about it—his handsome looks seemed to have made no impression upon her. After the train had started, she gazed for a little while abstractedly at the green fields and little distant hills on which the August sun was streaming down, but she did not seem to be conscious of the heat. She had recourse to no fan or smelling-bottle, such feminine devices were probably unknown to her. But she sighed once or twice as if her thoughts made her sad, as the train dashed past the minor stations, the familiar cuttings and embankments, till at last wearying of the

well-known prospect, she took an unattractive-looking little volume out of her pocket, and was soon as absorbed in its contents as if much depended on her perusal of it.

“German poetry—of all things!” mused Stanton, who was familiar with the language. He strained his eyes without success to make out the title on the cover, and reflected that the girl ought to have been more at home with a railway novel.

When they stopped at Shrewsbury he was fated to be even more astonished, for she, unconscious that his eyes were fixed upon her, took out a pencil and pocket-book, and commenced writing rapidly, as if every moment were of consequence.

“Translating—pshaw!” thought he, who considered his own translations to be of very superior quality. “Why, the girl must be a regular blue! she is so abstracted by her occupation.”

It was an ill compliment to himself,

he had never before been so slighted. It was a new sensation to be sitting opposite to a woman who was so little susceptible as not to know a master-piece of the Creation when she saw it. For it was not that she did not look at him, but she did not seem to take him in—her eyes when she met his were so pre-occupied and unsentimental.

He opened the window, and shut it. He even addressed the farmer's wife; but all without avail. Miss Gathorne remained abstracted. His curiosity was excited—the more so that when they arrived at Llandyffryn in the dusk of the evening, no servant or friend arrived to meet his travelling companion.

“Left like a parcel to be called for,” he thought, as he determined to make one more effort, and to offer her his services, if not the use of the carriage which was to take him to Caerwyn, taking it for granted that all women considered men to be absolutely necessary

to the care of their luggage and the other business details involved in a journey.

Once more he was taken aback by the simple matter-of-fact words.

"No, thank you! I am always used to manage for myself."

She did not even blush or simper, but she answered gravely with a pleasant smile, like the "Grannie" they had called her, like a woman who had achieved the dignity of years. Randal felt check-mated, and even personally aggrieved when the little lady stepped into the somewhat vulgar omnibus, which always ran in the evenings on the road to Llandyffryn. Was she the clergyman's daughter? Her father, if he were a right-minded man, ought not to let her travel about in that independent way by herself. She was dressed as if she came out of the ark, but she spoke as if she were a duchess, and Randal Stanton, taken down a few pegs in his own self-esteem, began to

think he must be growing ugly, and must need some philtre to make himself charming in the eyes of English nymphs.



## CHAPTER II.

THE autumn days at Llandyffryn passed more quickly than Randal could possibly have anticipated. He was sufficiently exhausted to be glad of rest, whilst the pure medicinable breezes supplied, as Dr. Harper had prophesied, exactly the fitting tonic for his overtaxed nervous system. He found himself tolerably comfortable in his new quarters at Caerwyn and grew accustomed after a time to the rambling old house with here and there an Elizabethan gable, or an ivied arrow-slit for a window—in which his mother had passed her girlhood, likening himself in his letters to the Doctor, to Rasselas in

his happy valley, and declaring that his "creature comforts" were all the greater, because he was alone in his bachelor den.

It was, as he acknowledged to his correspondent, a "sleepy, drowsy old hollow for a fellow to settle down in," but just then he felt as if he were a misanthrope, and tried to think more favourably of Llandyffryn because it was a sort of misanthrope's Paradise, with a desolation which divided him from his kind.

But after a time this phase of feeling ceased; for he who had been half maddened by a continuance of insomnia knew how to appreciate the blessing of the healthy sleep which returned to him in the invigorating air, in spite of the lowing of cattle and the clank of milk-pails in the early morning. And sleep restored him to his natural self, doing its work by enabling him to regain his self-command, and in reducing the exaggeration in his views of things.

His nerves were no longer shaken by

his habit of constantly dwelling on the terrible death of which he had been the involuntary witness. And though shattered health was not to be restored all at once, he regained by degrees a measure of the energy fit for his years. So that he not only enjoyed the rich prospect of vale and mountain, which could be seen from his own grounds—a prospect which was amply wooded on the one side, and which shewed glimpses of a sapphire sea on the other, but began to delight in a stiff pull up the summit of the distant hills, over rocky barriers and stony gorges, which would have seemed impassable to him a month before.

And next he was inconsistent enough to forget how he had declared to Dr. Harper that if the situation had one advantage which outweighed another, it was that of being removed from the stir of society. He no longer felt the necessity of attempting to conceal the jaded condition of his nerves, but began to amuse himself in an ironical fashion

with the aborigines of Llandyffryn. There were two rival houses in the little place—the Vicarage and the Doctor's—one the physician of the body, and the other of the soul—who should have striven together in good works, but who indulged in back-bitings and bickerings instead, to the horror of the damsels and matrons who discussed tea and scandal in each other's houses under pretence of a singing society and a Dorcas club. The quarrels had risen to such a pitch of late months that the Vicar was recruiting his energies by travelling abroad, having left his parish to the care of a hard-working curate.

In his absence Llandyffryn was duller than usual. But there still remained the house at which Randal was condescending enough to become a frequent guest. Its owner was the type of a race now nearly extinct, that of the traditional fox-hunting squire. And Squire Bathurst's wife made a pet of the delicate-looking, handsome newcomer, whose arrival at the Grange,

which had been so long untenanted, had created quite a sensation at Llandyffryn; whilst Randal, who was used to be petted by women, bore her coddling without irritation, if not with good grace. He thought he might be able to make use of Mrs. Bathurst, who was the model of a good-tempered woman—little, rosy, and plump of figure and face, with some project of usefulness always seething in her head, and who was energetic in putting her schemes into practice.

She “received,” as she called it on a certain evening in every week, and sent invitations to all the important people who lived within a few miles of Llandyffryn, and on the evenings in question, her tongue would be as restless as her feet. It was not entirely for the sake of ridiculing her that Randal frequented these weekly gatherings. The little woman, who turned round and round like a teetotum, as she attended to her guests, had at least a kindly heart which protected her from his banter, and her friends, except for

their affectation of superiority, had no salient points to ridicule. They were as negative as possible, having no opinions about anything; and Stanton, who had begun again to read and think—under the influences of a healthier life—would infinitely have preferred his seclusion to association with these human vegetables.

But the Squire had boasted in his simplicity that his wife knew everyone at Llandyffryn, and each time that Randal dropped in at Mrs. Bathurst's gatherings, his eyes insensibly made the tour of the room, as if in search of something that never appeared. Seven or eight times in succession he frequented Mrs. Bathurst's "evenings," looking for the face which was not beautiful, but which had haunted him on account of its intensity of feeling—its expressive eyes, and the mouth with its sensitive curves.

The face never rewarded his search, and he reminded himself that it was no wonder—for its owner was probably only a governess, and he could not sacrifice his

prejudices so far as to marry a governess. Still the evenings were dull without her. He wanted to talk to her about that German poetry, and began to forget that he had never exchanged a single word with her. At last he determined to question Mrs. Bathurst.

“Poor Maitland Gathorne! you describe her exactly,” she answered, as she listened to his satirical account of the leave-taking at Hereford. “They may well call her ‘Grannie,’ for she has the cares of a hundred grandmothers upon her. She was at Hereford ‘finishing’ as a pupil-teacher, till her father came to live at Llandyffryn; her real name is Maitland.”

“Why do you call the girl poor—and why do the Gathornes never mix with the other people here?”

“Don’t ask me—ask somebody else! I always hate having to gossip,” answered the good woman, evasively. “They came here in deep mourning, and no one knows much about their antecedents—but there are stories—scandals, vague rumours afloat

which the villagers do not care to investigate. Look at the dreary-looking cottage close to the avenue of yew-trees leading to the churchyard—it tells a story by itself—*that* is where they live in almost perfect isolation.”

“The avenue is unique !”

“And so are the Gathornes ! The father is either really learned, or he pretends to be a scholar—fond of his children, perhaps, but fonder of his books, Once they say, he was a lawyer, but now he writes for magazines. I suppose he does something or other to earn his bread, but how in the name of ill-fortune such people manage to live, is more than I can possibly make out. She is not a governess, but she *is*—*poor* Maitland.”

“I suppose you know her, as you talk so confidently ?” asked Randal, assuming a tone of indifference.

“I don’t think any of us know her personally, but everything we hear of her proves that she is sensible and good. I have no pity for the father with his head



always in the clouds—but I admire Maitland Gathorne—I must say I do. The women here don't appreciate her; they say she thinks herself distinguished because she does not do like other people. But, bless you, the poor child cannot afford time for any of our fiddle-faddles. She is devoted—enduring—she has a heart of gold. And as to being mixed up with anything that is bad, I don't believe she ever knew the shadow of an evil thought. Ask the ragged boys whom she teaches, and ask Mr. Moorcroft what he thinks of her!”

“But I have not the pleasure of knowing Mr. Moorcroft, or the ‘ragged boys’ either, whoever they may be,” said Randal, *sotto voce*.

“Oh, Moorcroft is only the Vicar's curate, who does all the Vicar's work for him—a state of things I would not tolerate if I were Archbishop of Canterbury,” answered the lady, with a toss of her head. “How ever those two people—Moorcroft and Miss Gathorne, I mean—

manage to bear up, is more than I can imagine."

The coupling of the two names jarred unpleasantly on Stanton's ears; and he began to look with more curiosity than ever on the modest figure in plain garments, which he occasionally met in some of his rambles through the village, and saluted with a formal bow, but never dared to address.

And when Winter denuded the trees of their intercepting foliage, so that the cottage by the yew-trees could be seen from his window, he found himself gazing more often at that specimen of art and speculating about the life of its inmates, than at the rust-red crags and broad valleys which had hitherto attracted him. It seemed as if he were fated never to exchange a word with Maitland Gathorne, and his old impatience returned, so that he wearied of Llandyffryn. The more so that the place seemed transformed in Winter, as if some evil spirit had been casting its spells upon it.

The climate which had been so pure and bracing, suddenly changed into an atmospheric tumult, which seemed only suitable to the more stunted fir trees, which had grown slant as they were blown upon by the action of the north wind, and to the gaunt, melancholy-looking thorns which could be seen from Randal's window. Whilst in the distance a sombre and cheerless sea howled against the black rocks, in a dismal minor key. There was a general dampness in the air, and little visiting even at Mrs. Bathurst's, whilst the scenery which Randal had admired in the autumn, now depressed him by its aspect of desolate grandeur.

Then came a reign of ice and snow, when Llandyffryn was deserted by all who could leave it, and during which Randal, who was tired of groaning at the bleak winds, the impassable roads, and of longing for the coming of the dilatory Spring, escaped to London, and wrote in his desperation to his old friend, Paul de Lafarges, to come and visit him in his Welsh

home, if he, the exile, were to live through another Winter.

“I know nothing about glaciers, and detest this snow,” he wrote in one of these fits of sudden impatience, when it seemed to him as if his youth and all its hopes had been driven into an abyss, as deep as the deepest chasm beneath the mountains of Llandyf-fryn; “but my prospects are gloomy enough to be as arctic as the horrors which surround me, and as yet I can scarcely believe in the unnatural and sudden wrench which has separated me from the life I held securely yesterday. I cannot ask you to immolate yourself here as long as the Winter lasts. But perhaps in the Spring-time you may be able to tolerate it; whilst a little of your society — a little more chaff and laughter—may help me to endure without prison-breaking.

“Fancy what the dreariness must be when even the parson has escaped into Italy, though as he is an antiquarian, and

has studied antiquities instead of men and women—one would have thought he might have studied palæontology amongst the aborigines here. Don't be afraid. I am not going to whimper. I have a consciousness that my inner man is not to be made a spectacle of. And if my health and the state of my pocket are to condemn me to this Siberia, it would be ridiculous for me to complain of the irremediable.

“ What saith the wisdom of the ancients ? Homer, for instance, ‘ My friends, be men and take to yourselves stout hearts.’ But my patience unfortunately is less than my fortitude. I flatter myself my heart would be stouter if I were put in a fortress-breach, with only death and duty in front of me, than it is where I have to keep the world behind me, and my face to the front, in an exile like this. If I were an ancient cottager, man or woman—it might fare a thousand times better with me. I should then pass the Winter as well as I could, hybernating

like a bee during the dismal months, when the snow falls unintermittently, or, as some Indian prize-poet phrased it—

“‘Too much, too much, much too much;’

and when for weeks you can scarcely venture your nose in the air. Then the tea and sugar would be wanted, and I should be almost at the end of my ‘baccy.’ But at least I should be acclimatised to rough winds and smoking chimneys, and should never know the advantages of another existence. Now I who was always afraid of darkness, and who dreaded ghosts from a child, begin to shiver at my own ‘shadder,’ and to feel as if I shall soon be a ghost myself. Or if I were only like a certain old gentleman here, who thinks himself a genius, I might hope, far from the tumult of society, with a mind free from a single care, to achieve a work of which the whole world might speak.

“But, alas! I am not a genius, and I never was ambitious. I can only amuse

myself with these specimens of character amongst the natives, in default of anything more exciting. And this queer old foggy to whom I allude, with his conceit, his musty books, and his tastes of an anchorite, with a daughter who immures herself alive with him in his den, and who, if she does not always enjoy herself, buries her regrets under a smiling face, are amongst the oddest specimens of my very odd neighbours. I am as bad as Silvio Pellico, and amuse myself with spiders—‘what a mad world it is, my masters!’ *You* at least are fortunate in having some of those ups and downs—accidents, or whatever you call them—in your amusing life, which must have been invented by the gods to break the monotony of existence.

“How I long for an adventure! You remember I always liked one—and I have no intention of submitting to old Harper’s Puritanism, or of becoming a living incarnation of one of Poussin’s pictures, with nothing but dark bistre for a background. Come and challenge me at cards,

pistols, or anything else—anything to break the dreariness of this intolerable *régime*! As boys together we would willingly have died for each other, and yet we never let a day pass without varying it by fighting.”



## CHAPTER III.

THE imperceptible coming of the Spring, with its sweet warm breath, its clear skies, and the distant sea deepening into blue, brought a change in Randal Stanton's varying moods. He was forced to admit that the early Spring was magnificent at Llandyffryn, when there was a genial freshness in the air, which was odorous with the scent of wall-flowers in cottage-gardens—the forerunners of the hydrangeas and tree-fuchsias which would put forth plentiful blossom later in the year—when the river tossed in its uneasy channel over moss-grown stones, to join the more distant ocean, and when numberless little

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waterfalls, unlocked from their wintry sleep, fell foaming down the sides of the frowning precipices. He forgot the oppression of the blank interval of Winter, during which he had had nothing to think of but the Doctor's dreary prophecies, and the dismal accident which had so suddenly revealed the weakness of his constitution, as to set a veto on his gay, *débonnaire* life on the Continent.

Retrospection was not a pleasant occupation to Randal Stanton, and in the Winter he had had plenty of time for retrospection. Even when he had ridden over to the neighbouring watering-place, he had sickened at the sound of the plashing of the melancholy waves — the waves which seemed to call to him from their dismal untenanted desert of waters with a ceaseless and monotonous dirge.

At home he had shared no better, hating his solitude, calling up his house-keeper to keep him company, and then wearying of her chatter. Deprived, once

for all, of the possibility of gaming, he deplored his lost chances, and counted as probable the splendid possibilities which so rarely fall to the lot of the amateur gambler. And yet, in the midst of these vague regrets, the scarified faces of the distant mountains during the lonely Winter days had constantly haunted him with weird images of the tragedy which he had witnessed.

When he was sitting alone he constantly saw the open eyes—glazed, and yet staring at him—the mouth in the ghastly contortions of death, and the fingers stretched out stiffly with blood upon them. And then there was nothing for it but to jump up and run, or to venture into the frosty atmosphere, even at the risk of injuring himself, or to return again, remembering the Doctor's dismal prophecies.

“But whether I am to be a short-lived man or not—it will be all the same in the end,” he would mutter. “A shot—a blow,”—he would add to himself, “and

then—a mere handful of dust—a machine which ceases to act—a thought which passes away like a morning cloud! Enjoyment till the deluge comes—and the after?” He dared not answer that question—“after?”

He had never been used to disagreeable questions. His life had hitherto been so gay and smooth that the sudden wrench from the flimsy things on which his interests had depended, seemed at first to be very hard upon him.

But when the birds began to sing again, and when the awful voice which in the Winter days had spoken to him out of the whirlwind could be treated as a delusion, then the more buoyant part of his composite nature again asserted itself. The melancholy which had been new to him could not endure for ever. And with a determination, as he expressed it, to “pull himself together” again, instead of giving way to collapse, he forgot the doom which seemed to threaten, and again amused himself with the solitary walks with

which he had been wont in the preceding Autumn to vary his leisure. Unfortunately he was neither geologist, botanist, nor entomologist. He was simply, as he would have said of himself, an aimless rambler, not by any means cut out for a country life, and only accomplishing pedestrian feats for want of other occupation.

In the month of April—too early for the tourists to appear—he was seldom impeded by man or beast in his lonely walks through the neighbouring passes. But on one occasion when he was sauntering through one of the wildest of the valleys—a few miles from Llandyffyrn—he heard the sudden howl of a dog—a howl which was twice repeated, as if the poor animal were in an agony of pain, and then, as he approached a turning of the road hidden from view by a mass of projecting rock, a woman's voice fell on his ears—a voice with which he seemed to be familiar, and of which he had remarked that it combined in an odd way

gentleness and strength. "Untie the string"—it said commandingly; "untie it at once! David Griffiths, if anyone had told me this of you, I would not have believed it. I thought you were beginning to understand a little about true manliness. I am sorry for the dog, but I am more sorry for you. Cruelty is the vice of slaves—it is mean—it is cowardly! A cruel boy makes a cruel man, and if you harden your heart to ill-treat a dog—by-and-bye you will ill-treat women and children."

A growling voice replied half in Welsh, half in English; and Randal Stanton, pausing to listen, did not comprehend what it said. But he heard the answer.

"No, it is not your own property—that is your mistake—you have not a right to do with any of God's creatures as you please—only a joke, you say; that is because you are so thoughtless! You don't stop in your excitement to think how the poor thing feels—it has no feelings, you say—you don't hurt it—

oh, look at it, it is writhing in its agony. Drop the string, I tell you. Drop it at once—or God will punish you.”

The voice was raised indignantly, angrily, imploringly; and at first Randal listened to it fascinated by its musical intonations.

“What a glorious voice!” he said to himself, as it rang again through the air, repeating authoritatively, “Drop the string!”

But in another moment he turned the corner of the road, raising his cane ready for use, and was surprised to see Maitland Gathorne standing with flushed cheeks, and tearful eyes before a couple of rough-looking hobbledehoys—either of whom could have knocked her down with a single blow of his fist—and who were tormenting an ill-cared-for, ill-favoured dog. Round each of its fore-legs they had tied a string tightly—the free ends of which (at a distance of a few yards) were held in their hands, so that at each pull of the

string by which they dragged the unwilling animal, jerking it nimbly, and with savage violence, it emitted a shrill whine, which told sufficiently of its sufferings.

"Release the dog!" repeated Randal, beginning to swing his cane; but the tormentors were not boys, they were powerfully-built youths of eighteen or nineteen, adepts in the fistic art, and far too strong to be easily intimidated by the threats of a delicately-reared town habitant. One stood in contemptuous silence, and the other answered by a derisive laugh.

"Don't threaten them," said the girl, turning round upon her protector somewhat ungratefully, "Griffiths and Owen understand me perfectly, and I think we shall get on better together if you do not interfere between us."

As a proof of the truthfulness of her statement, the young men nodded a little defiantly, but at the same moment dropped the strings, and stood staring at their pretended assailant.

"Put down your cane," said Maitland



Gathorne in her most imperial manner, and her knight-errant, taken aback, quietly obeyed her. But at the same moment he fumbled in his pocket and produced a well-filled purse, at the sight of which "Grannie," who had been pale before, flushed suddenly like the reddest rose.

"Oh don't!" she said with a look of horror in her face, "you will spoil it all if you do. I want them to do right for the sake of the principle, and not because they are paid to do it. I am sure that neither of them would touch a farthing of your money. They are too sorry as it is, for the wrong they have done—don't pay them for the wrong—put your purse back again quickly—who knows but you might tempt them?"

For at the sight of the gold in the purse, the young men's eyes glittered, but the deprecating words seemed to have cast a spell upon them, and both of them with downcast faces, shrunk away and disappeared.

"If she had lived in the Middle Ages,

they would have burnt her for a witch," thought Randal, drawing his breath hard, and wondering what would come next. He had thought to patronise this "plucky little English girl," but she was treating him as if she were a queen.

"What are we to do with the dog?" he asked, hesitatingly, after an awkward pause, during which they stood looking at each other, and he had had time to watch the changes in her intelligent and expressive face, and to be again struck with that serious look in it, which accorded so strangely with her years, and the odd little matronly air of authority and protection. "Fancy the fellows bolting, and leaving it on our hands like this! It ought to be put out of its misery as quickly as possible—shot or drowned, I suppose," he continued, raising his shoulders; "but what are we to do with it meanwhile? I—I suppose it can walk a little way," he added, looking at it as if the creature were eminently repulsive to him, but trying to rouse it to "make an effort," like poor

Mrs. Dombey, by administering what he intended to be an invigorating kick. Maitland winced as if she had been kicked herself, and though he did not quite know why, he felt a little ashamed and uncomfortable.

"Oh don't!" she repeated; "it has suffered enough, and as to drowning it, it is not so badly hurt as that. I will take it home with me, and after a very little nursing, it will soon be all right again. I know the dog well; it is a very useful one. But it can't possibly walk: look at its poor, swollen legs; it can't even stand up on them. I can easily carry it."

"*Carry it!*" he repeated, more bewildered than ever, "it will soil your dress."

"It will not matter if it does. I always wear dresses that will wash," she answered, with a smile.

And glancing involuntarily at her again, he saw that she had on a tight-fitting costume of rough serge, and was thankful that the ugly bonnet, which was kept for travelling and Sundays, was now discarded for a sailor's hat, with a blue ribbon

round it. The value of the hat he scornfully appraised at a couple of shillings, and the whole costume, which had been cut out and made up by her own skilful fingers, might possibly have been purchased for less than a pound. And yet she looked well in it! It probably suited her simple style better than the toilettes of elaborate texture, loaded with trimmings and innumerable puffings, to which his eye had become accustomed at the Continental watering-places.

"I cannot possibly let you carry it," he said, in rather a slower tone, eyeing the dog, whose appearance was so repellant to him, askance, with a look as if he were making up his mind to swallow some nauseous drug; "so if you are positively determined to take it, I ask for nothing better than to be allowed to accompany you, at the risk of being scolded for my interference. The dog is really too big and too dirty for you to carry it alone."

"I think it is far more likely that *your* coat will suffer than my dress," she an-

swered, with so humorous a look at that *chef-d'œuvre* of a London tailor, which was certainly wasted on the natives of Llandyffryn, that its latent irony had the instant effect of strengthening his resolution. He caught up the dog with a spasmodic effort, and holding it as far off from him as if it had been infectious, began to walk on the road to the village at a rapid pace by her side, trying to compensate himself for his penance, by making the best of his time, though at first he found himself prevented from exchanging many words with her. But when once the poor animal, intending to express its gratitude, took the liberty of wagging its tail, and by so doing managed to plaster Randal's coat and shirt-front with mud, his look of terrified dismay was so irresistibly comical that his companion burst into a fit of sudden, ringing laughter. He looked at her, laughed back, and thus the ice was broken between them.

“ You seem to take up with everything mongrel—mongrel dogs, and mongrel

boys! Everything ought to be ugly and insignificant, I suppose, to win your sympathy. I should think Llandyffryn must just suit you. It abounds with common-place people," he added, a little grimly, when their fit of laughter had ended.

"That depends on what you mean by common-place people. Surely the great majority of our fellow-creatures have nothing extraordinary about them. Our life here is quite ordinary—very insignificant I daresay, but for my own part I am very glad that we have no thrilling incidents—I like homely details."

"And mongrel boys, as I said—you are an enthusiast about them?"

"Who told you so?" she asked, flushing again; "I thought I kept such things to myself! I do not want everyone to know. But when we came here we used to find these boys always larking about together, birds' nesting on Sundays, or inventing some fresh form of mischief, till they were a continual source of torment

and annoyance to their neighbours—and—and I was sorry for them.”

“But what authority could *you* possibly have?”

“No authority whatever—no force but my own weakness. I found that I could *influence*,” she answered, quickly; “my only hope was to win them. For these *common-place* boys have *consciences*,” she said, with another unconscious touch of sarcasm; “they have a warmth of heart to work upon, they have promptings to do the right, of which cleverer people are sometimes destitute.”

“It is a very odd work for a young lady to engage in?”


“Do you think so?” she said, drily; “it is not so odd as it seems. Mr. Moorcroft is very good—he not only teaches me a little Welsh, but lends me a room—and he helps in the winter evenings to teach them to read and cipher; sometimes—you would be surprised—but they can even learn a little drawing and singing.”

He thought that such ideas were hor-

ribly Radical and subversive, and would, if they were carried out in other places, be fatal to the subserviency of the "lower orders," and tend to Red Republicanism at least. But he did not say so. He did not even interrupt her when she went on to tell him how she had succeeded in establishing a cricket club for the summer months, and how the boys had chosen a captain amongst themselves, and took pride in paying a weekly subscription of a penny each.

"They feel that they are a corporate body," she said, "whose honour they have to maintain, and though the boys were many of them the most turbulent creatures — what Mr. Moorcroft called "Pickles"—brimming over with fun and mischief, and inclined to be defiant, you would be astonished to find how they have improved, what a love of truth they now show—what possibilities for good!"

She might as well have spoken to Randal in an unknown tongue, for all the interest






that he manifested in the subject of her conversation.

“What can she have in common with Moorcroft?” he was saying to himself impatiently and jealously. “A good man but a wretchedly narrow one, hedged in on every side with faith in dogma. And then this ugly village life with all its filthiness and its ignorance, she might as well try to teach pigs.”

And yet he looked at her as her eyes softened and brightened, and as the fluctuating colour deepened and melted on her usually pale cheeks, not caring to interrupt her by any acknowledgment of his want of interest. It was queer and unconventional, he thought, and yet she was one of those women who would know how to do the strangest deeds gracefully. For in spite of the absence of regular beauty, she had subtle attractions, which consisted sometimes in the accent of her voice, and sometimes in the unusual play of her features. He would have found it difficult to define in what the charm



chiefly existed, but that it *did* exist he acknowledged to himself, and that very acknowledgment made him secretly resent the allusion to Mr. Moorcroft, and her enthusiastic benevolence to these coarse country bumpkins.

“Young Griffiths,” he said, with a little passing shaft, “must be a choice specimen of your success.”

“Poor Griffiths!” she answered, rousing herself at once for his defence. “He is certainly a downright Pickle, and some people are afraid of him. But I don’t expect him to become tractable all at once.”

“He has given us an illustration of that warmth of heart which you suppose to be dormant in these savages.”

“He is cruel from sheer stupidity!” she retorted, “because his instincts, as you say, *are* savage. But he follows the example which has been set to him by men of culture in the neighbourhood. *They* have taught him to maim and torture in the interest of sport. Ah—you

are a stranger here, but we have plenty of it in the autumn. Llandyffryn becomes what the Hindoos would call a hell of animals !”

“She can hit back pretty vigorously,” he thought, highly amused. “And it is just as I expected, she abounds in odd theories. I am not a stranger at Llandyffryn,” he said, aloud, with a smile; “at any rate I shall hope not to be a stranger soon, for I am going to live here.”

“Oh !” she answered, in a tone of unmitigated surprise, which he could not mistake for one of pleasure.

He remarked it, and added with increasing ill-humour. “I have no sympathy with the morbid dread of inflicting a little suffering, which raises such a hubbub about nothing in the present day. It is a sign of weakness and exaggeration—it comes of looking at things too narrowly. And after all, you know, it is certain to break down in practice.”

It was her turn, to say *in petto*,

"How absurd I am to think of arguing with a *man* about it. Men of the kindest nature, they say, have been sportsmen, and yet the word 'sport' always seems to scare the humanity away from them."

"I suppose if *you* were a fox, you would like to run for your life with the certainty of being torn by fierce fangs into little pieces, like Mazeppa, with the wolves after you. You would like to be killed for the mere pleasure of the thing, and to have your agonies prolonged—also for pleasure. You would choose, if you were a pheasant, to be riddled with shot, or to live on with a broken wing, if you happened to be a pigeon?"

"And *you*, I suppose, would like the foxes to be chloroformed before they run?" he asked ironically, with a return to his old languid manner. "I don't suppose we are likely to get to the root of the matter."

She did not answer, and they were both silent. They were nearing Llandyffryn. A fog which had gathered

during their absence, and which had descended from the higher mountains, till it enveloped the valley beneath them, was now blotting out the quaint old village, and covering the picturesque roofs of the houses with its vaporous undulations. The country presented so much the appearance of an arm from the adjacent sea, that a novice might have supposed the ocean had burst its bounds, and that the low-lands had been submerged beneath its advancing tide. For, as if to complete the illusion, bands of various kinds of sea-birds—from the heron or black-backed gull, to the smallest sandpiper—were swooping over the imaginary sea in ceaseless gyrations; some of them seeming to float on the agitated waves, and others to disappear towards distant rocky islets. Whilst the tower of the ancient church, dimly looming through the mist, might have been taken for the masts of a ship in distress, recalling tales of noble vessels which had actually been wrecked at a point not far off on that

same line of coast—called by the peasants the “Point of weeping.”

On the hill where they were standing the sun was yet shining, and the fir-trees filled the air with a resinous odour. The younger pines were already being crowned with spires of delicate green, whilst the parent trees, which had attained to their highest growth in former years, were exerting their strength in pushing out innumerable emerald needles to adorn the masses of their foliage, in obedience to the call of spring.

Randal Stanton shivered, and drew his great-coat more closely up to his chin.

“We shall have to go down into the fog, and it will be a choking one,” he grumbled; “and I never can endure the smell of these pines.”

“Oh, you prefer elms and oaks perhaps—or a forest like Windsor, or Burnham beeches, with relics of recent picnics,” she answered a little maliciously, but still in a demure tone, as she stood gazing at the view. “I would rather live at Llandyffryn

than anywhere else in the world. The smell of the pines they say is healthy—it is supposed to be good for consumptive people. But I daresay you prefer Rimmel's perfumes."

He shivered again and was angry; the more so at the signs of suppressed laughter in the dimples on her cheeks. Then she roused herself to add, a little pityingly, with that motherly air which made him wonder.

"I am speaking for myself—and should not, of course, think of recommending Llandyffryn to *you*—it would be a terribly dull place for you to think of settling down in?"

"Why especially for *me*?" he asked, shewing that he was nettled.

She was so accustomed to speak her thoughts, that she took no notice of his manner, but explained without hesitation.

"Because there are no balls and only dull parties at Llandyffryn—*very* dull I am told, though we never go to them—and

of course there are no theatres—no operas no—”

“Rotten Rows,” he rejoined; “or billiard-rooms, or clubs, or—shops for Rimmel’s perfumes? What else do you suppose is needed to complete my felicity?”

She was silent again; the dimples had disappeared, and now that they were gone, he wanted to see them again, and he asked after a moment’s pause,

“Do I carry all that in my face? You must be a terrible physiognomist! I shall really be afraid of you. Does Lavater tell you nothing else about me? Does he say that I am such an affected fool, so spoilt by the sweets of life that I can appreciate no stronger meats—that I have lost the power of taking delight in beautiful scenery for instance—in quiet reading—and in—in,” he added, rather hard up for further words, “in—the rest of it?”

She shook her head, and he continued,

“Lavater is a humbug—but don’t take



my word for it. Try me—and find out—after, say—I have spent a couple of winters in this place.”

He took a card out of his pocket-book as he spoke and handed it to her.

“Oh, we never visit anyone. It was kind of you to think of carrying the poor dog back for me—very kind of you, indeed—for, perhaps, I could hardly have managed it alone. But don’t trouble to come and see us,” she exclaimed, with such a sudden change from her former demure manner—such unexpected vivacity—that he could not doubt her earnestness, and his vanity was sorely wounded. The more so that she did not blush; her face was pale now, and yet her manner had not a suspicion of prudishness about it.

“My father never sees visitors,” she explained, a minute afterwards, when she saw that she had unintentionally hurt his feelings, “there is a reason for it. We are—not able to afford—necessary

expenses. And that is not all. My father suffers a good deal. The death of my mother was a terrible shock to him. She died just before we came to Llandyffryn."

She raised her eyes as she spoke, and the depth of sorrow in their expression, the moisture on the long dark lashes, and the sudden break in the full rich voice ended—he did not know how—by winning his heart.

"Such seclusion may be natural to your father at his age—especially if he is an invalid. Bnt *you*," he tried to expostulate, "you are too young to be"——

"*I* like it," she interrupted, "I am perfectly happy, I confess I might be sorry to see my sister, who is very pretty, shut up in this sort of life, but it suits *me* exactly."

"And yet at your age!"

"Oh, my age!" she answered laughing, "it is not so very juvenile;" I was called 'Grannie!' when I was quite a child,

and everyone says the name fits me. I *feel* like it, and so you see I can be quite contented now that my growing up children are 'doing for themselves' in a wider world. One of my brothers was clever enough to win an exhibition for Tunbridge School. Just now he is head-boy there; and soon he will be going into the Civil Service."

"One of your brothers?" he said interrogatively, anxious to draw her out.

"Yes; I have another, but he is quite a child. Hardly eight years old, and little—so little for his age. At first it did not alarm me much; but now—he hardly grows. And he is so pale too. Perhaps it is because I am always thinking about *him*—that I get anxious about all the poor little unprotected creatures. Somehow there is a look in their dumb faces at times which reminds me of Stephen. He is so uncomplaining—and yet I am convinced that nothing but the greatest care—"she said, unable to complete her sentence.

“Which he is certain to have,” he added, finishing it for her, “you say that this air is so healthy; I am sure he will recover.”

The ice seemed to have melted between them. And Randal, who generally detested children—listened with eagerness to her anxious confidences about the half-crippled boy. Talking of Stephen she seemed to forget herself, and almost to forget her determination not to trouble her father with visitors. But as they neared the avenue of yew-trees, her manner changed again.

And taking care of the injured dog which was now sufficiently recovered to be able to walk, and saying that she would restore it on the morrow to its rightful owners, she bowed, renewed her thanks—and disappeared in the mist which enveloped her like a diaphanous garment.

## CHAPTER IV.

“SOLD!” thought Stanton to himself, after days had passed by, during which he had had no opportunity of exchanging a word with Maitland Gathorne. “I who call myself a man of the world, and yet sold as neatly as if I had been Verdant Green himself! And she did it so easily, too—dismissing me with that duchess manner of hers, and yet disappearing as if she had been a witch riding upon her broomstick.”

He was not in the best of humours, for though that quiet banter of Maitland’s had put him upon his mettle, and made him determine to find an Arcadia in Llan-

dyffryn, though he tried to scorn the recollections of Bond Street, Pall Mall, Homburg, Baden, or Monaco, and had assumed a knickerbocker costume in disgust with his coat from Poole's—still the days dragged heavily and monotonously along. And though the fogs had ceased, and though the earth and heaven were in perfect beauty in all the blossom of the spring, he wandered no longer on the hills to watch the sunset, but lingered with halting footsteps near the avenue of yew trees. Once or twice he had seen Maitland as she went out of the cottage, but she passed him with one of her kindly, but dignified bows—a bow which could not offend him from the way in which it was given, but which had the intended effect of keeping him at a distance.

Randal Stanton was a man of devices, and he set his brain to work. Could he not manage to get up a fresh sensation about the woes of a suffering rabbit in the neighbouring woods, and take that opportunity to talk in fine-sounding words of

the direct proof of Satanic agency, as specially manifested in the sufferings of the brute creation at the hands of its vile tormentor—man? Or should he, like a superior being, hold his own ground, and write to Maitland to prove that the subjection of the domestic animals was on the whole an unqualified benefit to them, and that the hunting of stags and foxes was a merciful means of saving them from what would otherwise follow—their utter extermination. *Anything* to draw Miss Gathorne into an argument! He would even argue with her about the “boys” as she called them, if he could get her to let him hear her musical voice again; though his teeth were still set on edge by the recollection of having seen her come out of her evening school, when she did not know he was near her, and positively shake hands with one of the lumbering boors of the neighbourhood. He felt as if it would curdle the blood in his veins if *his wife* were to lower herself by such an objectionable proceeding, but then, doubtless when he was

married, his wife would be amenable to conventional leading-strings, and would allow the overgrowth of her virtue to be nipped into what he deemed to be a becoming shape.

Suddenly a new plan flashed upon him. Eureka! he had got it! "Ah—that's an idea!" he thought. "Girl as she is, she stands in the position of protector to her father, and I must snare her through his weaknesses, as they get at the mother seals through their young. From that day he became interested in the stooping, anxious-looking man, who was only fifty, but who looked ten years older, with his hair snowy white, and the lines of care on his face.

"There's a mystery about him, which I have never been able to fathom," said gossiping Mrs. Bathurst, who was always willing to chatter about anything concerning her neighbours. "They came here under a cloud, as I told you before, and no one knows much about their ante-



cedents. He would let himself be killed rather than answer a question."

She had built up a whole world of surmises in her head, and mentioned some of these to Randal, who dismissed them with a smile. And the good lady admitted, that whatever aspersions might have been cast on the reputation of the father, the wise conduct of the daughter, during their residence at Llandyffryn had helped to throw the vague rumours altogether in the background.

"They are positively coming to be respected, in a way," she said, "though he is the oddest of the odd. A genius—a poet—I have a volume of his poetry, called 'Sorrow and Song.' I will lend it to you, if you like."

Nothing could have been more fortunate than Mrs. Bathurst's suggestion, and Randal, who in common with most University men, had an absolute horror of the vapouring exhalations of second-rate poetry, with all its illusive unreality of colour, set himself to study "Sorrow and

Song," with as much earnestness as if he had been reading up for an examination. It needed some courage to get through the long, rambling verses, with their questionable similes, and straining after effects. The language, which was not always rhythmical, and very seldom intelligible, caused Randal, whose own melancholy had never been of the whining sort, many a hearty laugh at its egotistical pretentiousness. It did him good, by a sort of reaction, in leading him to consider the superiority of direct and unaffected utterances, and the absurdity of such whimpering, as an insult to both common sense and genius.

Nevertheless, when he had mastered every intricate sentence, he was by no means shaken in his resolution of calling on the writer of the verses, and introducing himself as a devoted admirer of his book. For Randal by no means prided himself on being one of those men, who would not stoop to flatter "Neptune for his trident;" and he would have said that

his conscience was not so squeamish, as to reproach him for indulging in a form of untruthfulness which was authorised by the usages of society. So it was with perfect confidence in the persuasiveness of his wily tongue, that he determined to force himself upon the recluse of the cottage.

“Oh, he is not so very formidable, if you manage him in the right way, and study his weak points,” explained Mrs. Bathurst, when she had been consulted about the intended visit. “To ladies he is always solemn and polite, if a trifle forbidding and cold. *I* see him now and then, and he is tolerant to *me*, because I take care never to allude in his presence to lawyers or parsons. He has a sort of mania on the subject of the clergy, and is what is called fastidious in a good many of his ideas.”

Thus forewarned and forearmed, and longing, as he said to De Lafarges, for something like an adventure, on one sunny morning in the beginning of May,

when the birds had been singing more musically than usual, and when the apple-trees were showering down their white and pinky blossoms on the little plot of ground which surrounded the Gathornes' cottage, Randal Stanton presented himself at its rustic gate.

As he did so, he remarked that the low, thatch-roofed building, which in winter had presented so gloomy an appearance, and which belonged to the old-fashioned class of dwellings that are being rapidly "improved," according to modern custom, from the face of the earth, could be made to look sufficiently picturesque in spring, when its gables and chimneys were covered by a profusion of creepers. And even the little plot of garden, which Maitland called "one's own important piece of land," surrounded though it was by rugged wastes of ground—now adorned by a profusion of flowering gorse, and which the neighbours were vainly trying to cultivate—looked pretty enough now with its few inexpensive flowers. orchids

and primroses amongst them, transplanted from their native woods, and a few graceful sprays of Solomon's seal.

So excessive was his impatience to inspect the penetralium that, receiving no answer to his repeated knocks, he gave a push to the door which was standing ajar, and thus obtained a view of an interior which was a new revelation to him as a specimen of what might be accomplished by taste and skill in the absence of ordinary monetary resources. For the door opened at once on a family sitting-room, which had been enlarged by taking down a partition, the floor of which as well as the old panelling on the walls had been carefully stained and then smoothly polished, so as to give the appearance of oak. Even the rafters of the ceiling had been utilised in the same picturesque fashion, whilst the remainder of the walls had been coloured a dark neutral tint, and were decorated in some places with engravings and water-colour sketches, and in others with book-cases filled with a few old folios in Russian

leather covers. Some of the pictures, amongst which were Millais' "Order of Release," Schœffer's "Monica and Augustine," and two little copies from Birkett Foster—were framed in ivy-leaves, whilst flowers in wire baskets hung from the ceiling near the window, or arranged in bunches, and growing in pots, ornamented the polished window-sills. The cloth table-cover was an old one, but it contributed its quota of ruddy colour, and was daintily edged with amateur point-lace. The mantel-piece was covered with china, arranged on quaint little shelves, whilst two or three rugs on the floor, and chairs which were high-backed primitive structures, heightened instead of lessening the general artistic effect.

"The people who live here must be worth knowing—some of them at least;" thought the curious interloper, as with one rapid glance of wonder, he took in all the accessories, and found, that the effect harmonised perfectly with the appearance of the fine old man who sat at

a smaller table apparently engaged in sorting papers.

George Gathorne did not hear the intruder's knock till it was loudly repeated, and then as the door opened he suddenly stood up, and glanced frowningly at his visitor. He was still very large and bony, and the protuberant development of the forehead was all the more remarkable from the loss of flesh, and from the care-worn expression of the shifting eyes. His complexion had now an unusual whiteness about it, and the expression of his face instead of being any longer comfortable or self-satisfied, was somewhat forbidding from its querulous weariness. On this occasion he stared without opening his mouth, in a cool indifferent manner, which was, to say the least of it, embarrassing and disagreeable.

"Well ! I have thought myself a terrible misanthrope at times, but this out-Herod's Herod," thought Randal, as he endured the stare, and on the principle of rejoicing at the misfortunes of one's neighbours,

tried to think it refreshing to meet with another man more exaggeratedly depressed than himself.

Yet we all shrink instinctively from unbecoming reflections of our own moods. And cynical as the young man had thought himself but a short time before, there was something repellent to him now in the older man's more marked phase of the same disease, flanked, as he had imagined it to be, by selfishness and bad-temper. Randal took a dislike to the poor scribbler at first sight, and was all the less scrupulous about liming his twig.

"You have been directed to the wrong house, Sir," commenced Mr. Gathorne, in his most chilling tones, when Randal, who had come determined to anticipate him, took the words out of his mouth with a tendency to over-act his part, as in the days when he had been a frolicsome under-graduate.

"Excuse me," he interrupted, "if I break upon your solitude—that solitude which I know to be so necessary for a



poet. I do not wonder after reading your poetry that you should shrink, as I have heard you do, from promiscuous association with the people here. But I am a stranger at Llandyffryn, having lately come from the Continent. And I have taken the liberty to come and tell you how I know and value your book. If I were to travel again, it should be my constant companion. I would carry it in my knapsack, and keep it under my pillow. Would—would it be troubling you too much if I were to ask you for your autograph?"

"You honour me," said the old man, evidently moved. But though he asked his visitor to sit down, the invitation was uttered with closed lips, and there was no sympathetic movement, such as extending the hand.

Nothing daunted, Randal helped himself to a chair, admiring the speckless purity of the floor, and the artistic taste which had presided at all the arrangements of the cottage. And though Mr. Gathorne an-

swered him at first a little surlily, clipping his sentences as if it were too much trouble to utter them, and dispensing with pronouns and auxiliary verbs. Randal, highly amused, continued to swing the incense, till the stammering tongue was at last unloosed, and the poet, believing thoroughly in the honesty of his worshipper, ceased to be laconic.

"You, who appreciate my poor efforts," he said, "belong to the minority. They do not know anything about literature in these parts, and it is true that I shrink from their society. My daughter makes friends among the poorer cottagers—but I—I retire into my home. I make company for myself. The necessity is organic with me."

"Organic with all geniuses," chimed in Randal, who had almost added, "and with snails!" Then remembering how he had heard that, when Mr. Gathorne spoke at all, he was apt to indulge, not in language of his own, but in quotations and allusions to recondite subjects, he

determined to be equal with him, and cap the quotations when he could.

"Poetic genius is like sodium," he said, "it must be kept under naphtha. Of course celebrity has its drawbacks;" he added, with a sigh.

Mr. Gathorne who heard the sigh, and whose ear caught the slightest possible inflection in the voice of his visitor, began to wonder if the young man were "going in for chaff," and looked at him more keenly, as he answered with a certain sharpness,

"The critics, Sir, did not appreciate my work."

"To be sure not, the critics are the men who have failed," answered Randal, with alacrity. "And on what grounds do they too often pass judgment on a book? On a single isolated sentence—a thought without its setting. Depend upon it, criticism is a mistake. But Nature will protect her own products. Poetry has centuries of life before it. It may be crushed for a time beneath ad-

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verse criticism, but it will burst out all at once like—like—lava from Mount Vesuvius, scorching its way amid the ashes, or like a Phoenix which rises stronger when it is supposed to be dead.”

“You are enthusiastic,” said Mr. Gathorne, still a little suspiciously. The shade still flitted across his face, and he again looked keenly at his flatterer. He did not quite know how to respond to this burst of fine frenzy, whilst Randal, who was entering into the spirit of the thing, and beginning to recall the old days when he had been reported for cock-crowing to the Proctor, was finding some difficulty in stifling his laughter.

“The young are sometimes enthusiastic,” continued Mr. Gathorne more slowly; “but my lot here is cast amid such prosaic surroundings that—though I am ashamed to acknowledge it—the book to which you allude has been almost an isolated effort. My life is by necessity dull and matter-of-fact.”

“So were the lives of Dante, and of—of

Michael Angelo," hazarded Randal with a gasp, and a remembrance that he cared little about either of these worthies.

"But at least in my poverty and loneliness I have had time to occupy myself with thinking upon fresh matters."

"Like a Columbus or a Newton," again interrupted his hearer, whose late school-boyish love of frolic was now so thoroughly roused that he blundered out the illustrations as they occurred to him. "*They* too had leisure to think upon fresh matters. Depend upon it you are the better for such leisure. There is no room in most men's lives in this horrible nineteenth century for any writing of a great and lasting kind—no room for anything but failures and impatience."

Mr. Gathorne was silent. The flattery was nectar to him, yet the word "failures" jarred upon his susceptibilities. For he could not help knowing that when he had ventured his prentice hand at many different styles of composition he too had failed ignominiously—failed in nearly everything.

His "fugitive verses" had been readily published by subscription, when he had numerous friends at Middle Hampton. But since then, in the years when he had been unknown and unintroduced, his brain had seemed supernumerary, and too often he had been compelled to proffer his manuscripts in vain. He was doing hack-work now, which he bitterly resented, but which occasionally astonished his employers by the ring of something genuine in it. He wrote, as he said, for his daily bread, articles in cheap newspapers, and light essays for periodicals. And the editors who knew something of the blare and tinsel in his former failures were surprised at the fragments of good sense which sometimes characterised these essays—peeping out amidst hazy verbiage like glimpses of blue sky—and at the occasional penetration of his opinions.

One of these papers in the "People's Journal" he now handed to Randal Stanton, apologizing for the commonplace subject.

“It is not that I care for the critics,” he carefully explained; “I agree with you in thinking that in the abstract it does not matter what they say or do not say. The clamour of a populace of jealous idiots would not affect me in the least if I were an *independent* man. But when a father of four children, whose ill-health has incapacitated him for an active profession, invests in his ink-bottle, he has a right to expect to earn more than a day-labourer with a hod of mortar on his back—and his peculiar circumstances should exempt—”

It did not appear what Mr. Gathorne's theory about criticism in such a case might be, for he suddenly stammered a little, coloured, pulled himself up in the speech which threatened to be a long one, and became laconic as usual. And Randal, following the direction of his eyes, heard the door gently close, and saw “Grannie” entering the room and glancing with a look of surprise at her father and his visitor.

He, too, became suddenly tongue-tied, and though he had intended to answer that

"every good poet was of course a good prose writer, and no prose writer need fail of something more than living by condescending to make use of that craft which was sure to underlie his diviner art," he also never uttered his encouraging sentence. For his eyes met Maitland's, and a look of keen, swift inquiry swept over her speaking face, which made him feel a little ashamed of having indulged in what he called "harmless banter."

"Allow me to introduce you to a gentleman, my dear, who is a great admirer of my poetry, and who can share with us that glorious communism of literature which gives us, even in isolation, the power of converse with the noblest minds."

Mr. Gathorne's voice trembled slightly with excitement, and again Randal shrank from the mute interrogation in the girl's eyes, and the look of tender protection which she cast at her father. The colour mounted to her face, but she did not utter a word of contradiction.

"She is so respectful to the old humbug,



and so tender to his absurdest foibles, that she makes one feel ashamed of oneself about nothing," thought Randal instinctively becoming forbearing likewise. He was even conscious of beginning to honour the girl for the poverty of her dress, and the evident restraint which she put on herself on the score of expenditure. "What does it matter?" he thought, "when she has a brave and generous spirit clothed in a body as noble as itself? Yet how on earth does she know that I have been laughing at the old fogey? She can't have been listening at the key-hole?" he asked himself, reflecting for the first time, that his laughter had been unmanly, and looking a little confused as she said coldly,

"We need no introduction; we have met before." And then with a meaning in her words which only Randal could interpret, she continued with her little air of dignity, "My father seemed to choose a melancholy topic for his book. But there are people in the world who belong to past

sorrow, and who are deserving of respect in consequence."

The young man had a queer sense of being made to eat "small-pie," he did not exactly know how, as Mr. Gathorne added with unusual jauntiness,

"Ah—my daughter is a true woman—she likes to hear poetry, she enjoys the effect of it—but we don't expect her to know anything about the dactyl and spondee!"

"No dear," she answered quietly, beaming on him in her tender matronly way, as if their mutual relations had been inverted; "I am far too matter-of-fact to think of taking to rhyming; and if *I* were to turn poet, what would become of the boys?" The answer seemed to be conclusive; nor did Maitland open her mouth again to make any remark of importance, during the remainder of Randal's visit.

To see her modestly seated in one corner of the room, busy with her needle, one would have supposed that she only cared for household affairs. She was wearing a

simple cotton dress, perfectly fresh, and made of a convenient walking length, without ruches or paniers, flounces or tucks. And though Randal again could not help being scornful about the cheapness of the material, which might have suited a kitchen-maid, he admired the smallness of her hands and feet—the cleanness of her cuffs and collar, and the neatness of her hair, and was not scornful as to the general effect, which was graceful rather than beautiful.

He had no excuse for lingering, especially as Mr. Gathorne invited him as courteously as his stiff nature would allow, to “look in again” some other afternoon, and give him his opinion on the article in the “People’s Journal.”

“How that girl talks with her face!” he said to himself as he went home. “She scarcely *said* anything, but it is something like magic. The expression sleeps in her face, and then illumines it in a moment like lightning in a cloud.”

There was a wonderful fascination in it

and he began to understand how his mother, who was not beautiful, might have been eminently lovable. He even began to philosophise about it, and to reflect that if he had to choose between the graces which enthrall the soul through the senses, and the traits of character which gradually win veneration and sympathy, he should certainly prefer the latter. He went so far as almost to wish that he had not talked that ridiculous jargon to the "old fool," for the sake of accomplishing his own ends.

"And yet he brought it on himself," he said, "and he is too thick-headed to suspect me of laughing in my sleeve. Shakespere, Spencer, Pope, Scott and the rest of them were all men of the world. It is only poetasters who delude themselves about their genius absolving them from submission to the usual conditions of life. Sorrow, indeed! I dare say he has had no more sorrow than the rest of us—though that girl looks at him so pitifully. Perhaps if she knew the

nightmare horrors I have suffered once or twice, she would spare a few of her pitiful glances for *me*."

In this frame of mind he set himself that evening to the study of the article in the "People's Journal." He was astonished to find that it contained no tangled speculations or meaningless sophisms, but was written on a social subject of considerable interest which was attracting much attention just at that time. It denounced, in no measured terms, the half-heartedness and the demoralising luxury which were sapping the vigour of the present age, and compared it to a like decadence under the Roman Emperors. It pointed boldly to some of the vices of our present state of society, as at war, not only with the law of Christ, but the morality of the heathen sages. And amidst much that was stilted and laboured, Randal came upon new and striking thoughts, expressed in terse and vigorous English, and sparkling here and there in the essay like diamonds in a heap of

sand. He drew a deep breath when he had finished the article, and acknowledged that he had undervalued the curious old man

“The inequality of the composition is the oddest thing about it. And yet there is power in it, though the power is so oddly unequal. I wonder he wasn’t sharp enough to know I was fooling him to-day. Yet he seemed to live in the shallows, and not to be able to get out of them;” thought Randal, rubbing his brow as he rose to refresh himself by a “weed,” and to take his usual stroll at the same time in the evening air.

The night had come—a night, clear and limpid, in which the disc of the moon could plainly be seen, with myriads of stars glittering in the vault of the sky. The essay, unequal as it was, had set Randal thinking. It, and the sight of Maitland Gathorne, had taken him out of his own narrow groove, and had given him that yearning after Purity and Infi-

nity which the most worldly of men may experience at times. Religion, flanked by ill-temper and spiritual pride, by hypocritical subterfuges and respectable expediciencies, had never commended itself to the admiration of the man. But he remembered that his mother's religion had been of a truer and loftier kind, and so, perhaps, was Maitland Gathorne's. With Paul de Lafarges, he had learnt to think that the beliefs drawn from the Bible were like all other beliefs—the mere inventions of men.

“Neither ghost nor devil,” as Paul had been wont to tell him, “had ever yet returned from the other world to let him know anything about what was passing in it.”

“What then?” asked Randal, as he looked up to the vast expanse above him, throbbing with its innumerable lights—elevated and purified he did not exactly know how, by some new and rather confusing emotions. “To what purpose

then are those myriads of useless worlds—moving harmoniously, without a will, in infinite space? And I—what do I know of myself but that I must *die*? Die to-morrow perhaps—like a dog—if I am to credit De Lafarges. And then, will there be nothing *afterwards*? Nothing even for these good people who live for such high motives—or for those saints and martyrs who gave their blood for what they conceived to be the truth? If so, what a useless mystery is existence! What profit is it to marry, or to be useful, or to make money, or anything else!”

The wind fanned his temples and lifted his hair at that moment, blowing cool, pure and reviving from the distant sea—the wind which had proved so “*medicinal*” in restoring his shattered health. And with the dim remembrances which were wafted to him in his present mood by that wind, a voice, soundless as his own, seemed to repeat to him



words which he had learnt at his mother's knees,—and which he had sometimes smiled at since—strange, incomprehensible, mysterious words, treating of the necessity of a new birth into a higher and purer state, and of becoming like a little child to understand the mysteries of the Kingdom. “What is it?” he thought to himself, “my mother's voice? Poor, noble-minded mother—I wonder where she is now—millions of miles away amongst those stars? I remember what she taught me—I learnt it from her gentle lips years ago, and unlearnt it sedulously years afterwards. Or is it more likely to be one of those queer growths of the mind which form the ground-work of our dreams, and may recur to us in our waking state? At any rate *I* have nothing superstitious in my organisation, though from certain causes I may be nervous, and my nerves play me tricks. We all talk of dying, and feel as if we are immortal. And for

my part I don't realise it ; it will be time enough for me to realise it when my turn comes."

A light glimmered from a lattice-window in the cottage by the yew-trees, as Randal, shaking himself out of a reverie which he was inclined to think effeminate, hurried back to his pillow.

"The old man is at his vigils to-night," he thought to himself as he flung away the end of his Havannah. "No wonder he looks so cadaverous. It's hard lines for him, poor wretch, to have to fag for his living in that manner. Now, on eight hundred a year," he reflected, "in a place where provisions are as cheap as this, one might keep a family without an atom of anxiety ; and one might make one's conscience easy by securing the best of both worlds—supposing the second to exist."

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Randal thought no more of the light in the lattice-window, which was burning long after his eyes were closed in sleep.

Perhaps his slumber might not have been so refreshing if he could have guessed that the brain which was still so hard at work, and the hand which was toiling so wearily over sheets of paper belonged, not to an old man, but a delicate, over-worked girl. A girl, who in spite of her need of thorough education, had ventured to cope with some of the fallacies, and assail some of the superstitions of her times, and who had even managed to apply the searing iron to Randal Stanton's easy-going conscience. George Gathorne's daughter was popularly believed to be so feminine as to prove no companion for her scholarly father. And yet it was her superior intelligence—her instinctive womanly talent, and her strong common sense, which enabled her to suggest to him subjects for composition, and afterwards to correct and "look over" them, as she modestly expressed it.

Thanks to her skilful touches, her amend-

ments and corrections, George Gathorne was beginning not only to be fairly paid for his work, but to obtain an ascendancy over the masses, and to have his ardent partisans, and vehement detractors. What was marvellous about it was, that no one suspected the girl's part in the matter.

"Oh, I only help a little in copying, correcting, and so on. He writes so rapidly that I can't expect him to see his mistakes," she would say to herself, when she found that her father was beginning to make a name, and she did not know that her sensation of triumph was like that of a dramatic author who hears one of the characters he has created applauded. The illusion was perfect; so complete that, though Mr. Gathorne appreciated his elder daughter, as he had appreciated his wife before her, and continually extolled her as the crowning ornament of his *ménage*, it was his custom to depreciate her intellect; and his eldest son, following

his father's example, quite patronised his sister.

But what did it matter? If Maitland knew her own power, and I doubt if she knew it, ambition or success was nothing to the heart of such a woman. It did not even seem ludicrous to her that the articles which her father wrote at her suggestion, and which were continually altered and re-written again by her untiring hands, should be believed by him, in the sincerity of his soul, to be his own. She wrote away now, though her body was very weary, and though drowsiness was coming with the returning daylight. Then she put out her candle, and sank into a heavy sleep. But at nine o'clock she was presiding at the breakfast-table, enduring without a murmur Mr. Gathorne's complaints—now at the coffee—now at the toast—and now at the corrections and alterations which she had made in his original copy. He always complained, and even rallied her on her dullness. That was a part of the regular

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programme, but what did it matter, since it ended by the adoption of every one of Maitland's amendments?

## CHAPTER V.

OTHER eyes besides those of Randal Stanton's had watched the light burning late in Maitland's window. Those eyes belonged to James Moorcroft, curate and widower with two children, who, owing to the valetudinarianism of the rector, was at present doing all the work in the parish of Llandyffryn. None of the richer people thought much of Parson Moorcroft, and though he was a man of some ability, he had not been able to conquer the irrepressible drowsiness of the congregation at Llandyffryn. Nothing about him was calculated to attract remark. He was neither short nor tall,

neither handsome nor plain, and he seemed to have an instinctive aversion to anything that could draw attention to himself. Even his dress, the materials of which were not particularly poor—for he had independent sources of income—was neither studied nor neglected. He would have been pronounced by most people to be an ordinary “willow-pattern” sort of man; one of those curates with no particular gift of preaching, and no personal *éclat*, whom the most assiduous of female worshippers could scarcely have transformed into an interesting pet.

It was only those of the parishioners who had known bitter sorrow, who could appreciate the true nobility and unselfishness of his nature. He had watched Maitland Gathorne with deep sympathy from the first, when with a broken-down old man, and a crippled boy as her companions, she had come to reside as an alien amongst people who were strange to her. He had recognised from the first her rare and genuine character, which had nothing



in common with the weakness and self-assertion of the father, and had noticed how Nature had adapted itself to circumstances, by shifting the burden from the incapable man to the stronger shoulders of the woman. He admired and yet pitied the girl who had neither support, nor consolation, nor counsel from her father, but whose strength seemed to be augmented by her intellectual solitude, and whose spirit had risen to meet her difficulties, so that she seemed to be ten years older than her actual age.

He knew something of her story too—the pathetic story of her past life, which had come out in broken and disjointed sentences since a tacit intimacy had sprung up naturally between them. He knew how Maitland's mother had displayed a like energy in troubles which would have daunted the majority of women—how Mrs. Gathorne had shown herself amidst crushing difficulties to be cheerful, intelligent, and firm, and how, when she had died, there seemed to be nothing more to hope

for from a character so feeble as that of her husband's. He became a prey to insurmountable languor and inertia, which made him timid and reserved as well as desponding.

"It was not that he gave up his profession, as they said. We cannot blame him for that, for the work gradually left *him*. Everybody had dropped him as a legal adviser for some time before he retired to Llandyffryn. It was grief for my mother's death; he used to be very different," Maitland had more than once explained, when attempting to account for the violent fits of discouragement which overtook her father, and obliged her to help him with her active brains, as her mother had helped him before. Like her mother too, she had tried to keep trials and privations to herself, and to spare the invalid anxiety, by suffering alone. But the secret had gradually oozed out to Mr. Moorcroft. It was he who had procured her an introduction to the "People's Journal," and it was he also who supplied her wonderful fingers, which

seemed never to be empty, with other work, the neat fancy-work, in imitation of fine old point-lace, with which Maitland had been hitherto wont to occupy her spare hours. It was he too who lent her books such as his library supplied—hard books of travel with unpronounceable names, tales of missionary enterprise, or reviews with feeble echoes of departed eloquence, and occasionally adorned with theological phraseology—books which supplemented in an odd way those on which her father principally fed, and which belonged to the eighteenth-century philosophy. The works of Rousseau, Voltaire, and Hume figured amongst the latter, and had imbued Mr. Gathorne with opinions which made his sense of chilly dreariness, when all the mementoes of his dead wife had been gathered out of his sight, greater and more overpowering than it would otherwise have been. But it had been necessary to remove all these reminiscences. For, before they came to Llandyffryn, the unfortunate man had yielded so terribly to deep-rooted

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depression, which sprang from his conviction that he had been to blame for the ruin of his family, that Maitland had sometimes trembled for his sanity.

“Oh, you can’t think what it used to be,” she had told Mr. Moorcroft. “He used to say that he had ‘business’ which would occupy him for the day. And what he called his ‘business’ was shutting himself up in the room in which she died, examining all the clothes which she had worn, her books, her little treasures, and then giving way to his grief. I knew what *she* would have wished, that I should devote myself to comforting him. And so I left the school where I had been happy as a pupil-teacher, and brought him almost by force to Llandyffryn. There were a great many debts to be paid, but we have this cottage at a low rent, and though I expect he will never get over the gloom of absence, and sense of abandonment which came upon him at the first shock of my mother’s sudden death, still he is better now, and,

thanks to you, we are beginning to get quite rich."

"Thanks to your *own* cleverness, your originality, your industry," Moorcroft would have liked to add, but he never ventured to flatter her. He even had to humour her in her conviction that her father's literary talent was infinitely greater than her own, and that if she were ever tempted to think slightly of it, it must be her own perception which was at fault. He sympathised so keenly with the girl as perfectly to comprehend how it was that she could be indifferent to personal success, not wishing to make herself known to the world, but merging her own identity in that of others. And he showed his sympathy by giving her occasional hints—hints which were always useful to her, for though he was generally taciturn, his few words were full of meaning, and always to the point.

George Gathorne, who looked on this growing intimacy with the alarm of selfishness and distrust, had, only a few months before, determined to question his daughter

on the subject—asking her whether Mr. Moorcroft's "attentions" pleased her, and whether she intended this sort of thing to go on?

"*What* to go on?" she answered with averted face. "Our acquaintance with Mr. Moorcroft? We know so few people here, and I should be sorry to lose the best friend I have—but as to whether he always continues to be as kind to me as he is now—it—may be—according to circumstances."

"What circumstances?" he asked her sharply; "if, for instance, he came one day to ask you to marry him?"

"Then he would *not* please me. I could not care for him in *that* way. What are you thinking of, dear? As if I were not happy enough with *you*!" She had given her answer, and her father was contented. The more so when she went on to explain to him that what she most prized was her liberty. She loved to roam on mountain or on fell, or beneath the shade of the pine trees in the hours when she was not en-

gaged with him or with Steenie. Her heart beat for no one, as she phrased it, "in that way;" it was too full of duties and anxious thoughts for others.

Since then her manner had altered imperceptibly to Mr. Moorcroft, and slight as the alteration was he had been aware of it. The change had had but one effect on him—that of causing him to devote himself more than ever to his work, and to lead what his neighbours called an "austere life"—almost as secluded as if he had been in a cloister. When he met Maitland he was, if possible, more kind to her than before, looking at her whenever he forgot his new reserve with eyes that were as full of goodness and benevolence as ever. And, if their long conversations had ceased, by a sort of mutual consent, he still answered her questions when she applied to him as she occasionally did for assistance—his answers being as before, full of intelligence.

"There is much more in him than people think," she would acknowledge to herself

afterwards. "He seems to have read a little on almost every subject, and it is not *his* fault if he has not the power of making his thoughts interesting."

She was vexed at her father's interference; vexed at what she thought his "fancy;" but she little suspected how James Moorcroft unconsciously watched her proceedings. The village was but small, and he was perhaps unfortunate in the fact that the window of his house, like that of Randal Stanton's, commanded a view of the cottage in the hollow. And when on the preceding day he had sat at his simple dinner, with one little curly-headed four-year-old urchin on his knee, and another on a high-backed chair by his side, his digestion had been somewhat disturbed by the sight of Randal at the garden gate, and by the knowledge that the unusual visitor had not only been admitted, but had stayed for some time at the Gathornes. He had noticed the perfection of the slim, well-proportioned figure, and identified it at once with the face which he



had once or twice encountered in his walks about the neighbourhood, and which had attracted him by its finely-cut profile and short upper-lip.

“ Handsome, but weak,” he thought ; “ with an indolent expression of countenance. Just the sort of man who ought to marry a woman more capable than himself.”

He was roused by the clamouring of the young rascal on his knee, who had been munching the greater part of the pudding, while his father was in a reverie, and had scalded himself by taking a mouthful a trifle too hot for him. James Moorcroft was seldom irritable, but he gave a little angry sigh as he put the child more hastily than usual on his feet, and ringing for the servant, tried to return to his common-place duties, dismissing an hypothesis from his mind which threatened to become tormenting.

“ I suppose it is what they would call a presentiment,” he thought, trying to mock at himself. “ I may leave such

things to old women who have time for such humbug. What *is* a presentiment? The naturalist, I suppose would attribute it to a secretion of the brain—a product of our mortal organism; and the spiritualist would refer it to sympathetic association. *I* at least have something else to do than to trouble myself with such nonsense.”

## CHAPTER VI.

A FEW weeks later, Llandyffryn began to put on its summer charms. The mists were over for the season, whilst from some of the surrounding hills it was possible to enjoy on a bright day, a prospect scarcely to be surpassed by any in Britain. The whole of the neighbouring country seen from the summit of these hills lay outstretched like a map, whose mountains and valleys, lakes and rivers, were only bounded by the silver line of the sea, whilst lands more distant still might be made out on the horizon. Llandyffryn itself—which was all the more suited for an attractive residence,

inasmuch as it lay a little out of the beaten track recommended to the ordinary tourist—was now like a natural garden filled with verdure. The oak and ash, which would not flourish on the bleaker heights, were now blending their rich masses of foliage with more homely fruit-trees. Every evening, the nightingale, having returned from warmer climates, was filling the air with its melodious accents and passionate complaints, whilst the swallow, which had taken its flight early in the autumn, had now come back at the time of idylls and had built its nest to rear its young.

Randal Stanton would have been difficult to satisfy if he had not admitted the summer attractions of his formerly despised home. The fishing was a resource to him, and he anticipated the wild-fowl shooting which might supply him with abundant sport for the autumn days. He had taken to riding as well as boating, and the river—which in the winter time had either been blocked with half-formed

ice, or had dashed foaming through the narrow gorge which was formed for it in one place by black lichen-clad rocks surrounded by fir-woods—now gently rippled into pools frequented by the trout, or by the sewin later in the year. The man had never been given to sentiment, but there was much in the soothing beauty of this quiet home-scenery which roused hidden aspirations behind his outer life. Here with a wife able to sympathise with him, and undisturbed by the world, it seemed to him for the first time to be possible to spend his days in peaceful repose. It was a dream which recurs to most men once in a life time, like a memory of Eden, handed down through the ages. Stanton had become a frequent visitor to the Cottage. He had availed himself of his invitation at once, without leaving Mr. Gathorne leisure to repent of it, and often brought him some new book or paper, about the sunset hour when Maitland was sitting over the deep-bodied tea-pot, or Steenie see-sawing in his American chair.

For the lame boy, in whom he thought it politic to take a strong interest, was not sufficiently weak to be entirely confined to the sofa. The child had suffered from hip-disease, which made it impossible for him to walk. But he could be carried from the sofa to a chair, and from the chair to a contrivance—not much better than a wheelbarrow—in which Maitland, assisted by her one maid-servant, had been wont to push him round the garden. Randal had taken the first opportunity of purchasing a proper invalid chair, a chair which moved easily on wheels, and on which the boy to his great delight, could be wheeled about the neighbouring lanes; and had presented it with many deferential apologies to ward off the possibility of wounding the father's sensitive pride.

Since then he had taken the boy ostensibly under his protection, and never visited the Cottage without inquiries after Steenie.

“How is he to-day?” he would ask in a cheery voice of gloomy George

Gathorne, and win Maitland's approving smile by taking no notice of the petulant tone in which the old man would answer.

"Neither better nor worse, he will never be fit for anything in this world."

Randal had all sorts of "plans" about Stephen's future, and though his plans were rather vague, George Gathorne listened to them, and Maitland thanked him for them with the expressive face whose every change he had learned to watch, comparing it as he did so, to a piece of plate-glass, in which you could see straight down to her heart. When a beautiful or tender thought gave transient colour to that face he felt himself amply rewarded for any amount of self-sacrifice, and no longer wondered at himself for the kindly acts which he had never before dreamt of performing, or perhaps they would not have been so novel to him. One of Randal's plans for Steenie's health lay in constant expeditions into the surrounding country for the benefit of the air. Expeditions from

which Maitland would have excused herself at first, on the score of her excessive occupation, had not her father urged her to accompany the child.

It was evident that Mr. Gathorne did not like his daughter's domestic activity to appear a matter of necessity.

"She likes to do these things herself;" he explained, a little stiffly.

"Because we have only one servant," Maitland answered, with perfect truth; "a maid-of-all-work whom we cannot dispense with, but who comes to us for very small pay from the village. But I think I can now and then spare a few hours at a time."

A "few hours" may do wonders in advancing mutual understandings. A child has the happy gift of not being company. And though Steenie was rather more precocious than most children of twelve—his qualities of heart and mind being forced into artificial growth by unusual suffering—still his company never seemed to interfere with the pleasant and



familiar intercourse which had lately been established, like a sort of freemasonry between his sister and Mr. Stanton. It was, as I have said the time of idylls, a time when the whole world seemed to be fuller than usual of that music in which the old Greeks included all beautiful things, poetry, heroism, and the harmony in which all Creation is planned, and the girl unconsciously opened her heart to her new friend, during the long rambles which they took together. Rambles, sometimes to a ruined castle in the neighbourhood, sometimes past a rapid brook whose waters dashed over smooth brown stones, sometimes through the lush green meadows with cattle standing knee-deep in grass, and sometimes down the slope of the valley towards the sea. The sea could not be reached in one of these rambles, but it could be gazed at in a nearer aspect beyond the sharp lines of the hedges, with its rich blues and brilliant greens, lying in long swathes on its surface, with now and then a sail on it,

white as a sea-bird's wing, or with purple shadows in the clefts of the rocks which jutted out upon the shingly beach.

It was hard work to get so far, but Steenie delighted in it. If anyone could have told Randal Stanton a few months before that he would be seen pushing a wheel-chair through some of the Welsh lanes, or carrying a crippled child up precipitous ascents, he would have dismissed the prophecy as being utterly absurd. But the unobtrusive family-love which he had been witnessing week after week in the low-roofed cottage at Llandyffryn was so moulding and transforming him, by its quiet and gentle influences, that he had ceased to see anything droll or derogatory in this new form of helpfulness. The Gathornes' poverty-stricken sitting-room with its worn-out furniture, had come to have a new sort of glory in his eyes, and the slight, brown-eyed girl, whose life was full to the brim of activity and earnestness, who looked like one of Fran-

cia's Madonnas, and who was so young and yet so ready to battle with every difficulty, was ceasing to be an enigma to him. He had left off shrugging his shoulders and saying to himself, "She is a democrat by nature," when Maitland lingered during their walks to ask after the poor people's ailments, with that voice which had a subtle charm in it, and which sounded to him sometimes as if there were solemn strains of music in it. He thought he forgave her for the sake of the voice; he did not know how she was gradually winning him from the narrow worlds through which he had been wont to wander, to her wider and nobler horizon of thought, and how the fascination about the presence of a young and pleasing woman was acting like a spell upon him, to wean him from that lower life in which self-indulgence and pleasure had been the objects of his existence. Accustomed as he had lately been to the hollowest form of Continental society, there seemed to him to be something touching and unusual

in the bond of intimate and close family love which united Maitland to her father and brother. Her desire to please them, her unselfishness—her *naïveté*—above all her devotion to the motherless Steenie, seemed to him, in itself, like one of Crabbe's or Wordsworth's poems—an Idyll in this time of idylls, suitable to the silent beauty and infinite repose of this out-of-the-world place.

A letter received from Paul de Lafarges just at this crisis, in which his friend joked him about his ridiculous and unnecessary exile, advising him to kick over the traces as quickly as possible, and to consult a Paris doctor instead of that English humbug—and yet promised to come and wake him up during his next winter's hibernation—jarred upon him in a way he could scarcely have described. He wished now he had not asked Paul to come and visit him, and found himself more than once wondering what De Lafarges would say to his milk-and-water ways, to the fact that he had ceased to have intoxicating spirits

in his cellar, that he managed to get on pretty comfortably without a billiard-room, and had almost forgotten the existence of cards. Above all, what would his quondam friend think of such a woman as Maitland Gathorne, and would not "Grannie's" brown eyes open widely at such a specimen of human nature as Paul? He almost laughed at the idea of the two coming in contact, and thought.

"What a queer trio we shall make—Paul, who will mock at my humble Welsh paradise. *She* — God bless her! — who would tell me to think more of the celestial Eden which she believes in, and which *he* would do away with. And I—who feel that Earth is my home, and Heaven so high above me that I can never aspire to it! But, at least, De Lafarges will find his match in Maitland. He will be obliged to confess that I have lighted on a wife who will be out of the ordinary groove even of English girls, and he is always repeating Pope's couplet about colourless women."

"A wife!" He pulled himself up as he uttered the words, remembering that the oddest thing about Maitland's behaviour to him was the entire absence of all sentiment; the fact that in their constant association she seemed altogether to forget that he was a young man and she a young woman. It was tiresome, and he blamed himself for it.

"It is partly her perfect simplicity," he thought, "and partly my own fault, because of the fraternal solicitude I tried to throw into my manner, when I feared she might otherwise refuse my offer of helping her brother."

## CHAPTER VII.

AS soon as it was discovered that the owner of Caerwyn was a constant visitor to the cottage by the yew trees, the few families, who for the greater part of the year constituted the society of Llandyffryn, changed their opinion about the Gathornes.

They suddenly found out that Maitland was a "poor dear," who managed admirably on small means; that her manners were unexceptionably ladylike, and that her father, in spite of what was said about him, was decidedly clever. Mrs. Bathurst led the way, by declaring that the Gathornes were not people to be slighted,

and asking the daughter to one of her receptions ; whilst other notabilities speedily followed suit, so that fresh amusements and means of association were suddenly opened to the girl.

Maitland astonished everybody by quietly accepting these attentions. Whatever fell to her share she seemed naturally to enjoy, whilst her rapid success in a little world to which she had hitherto been a stranger, was a phenomenon which, while it gratified Randal, was somewhat amazing to Mrs. Bathurst.

The little woman who was so round and good-tempered, and almost noisy in her gaiety, and who took it as a matter of course that she should patronise " the girl," did not know what to make of this new specimen of maidenhood, which slipped through her fingers, and took the patronising in its own hands. Mrs. Bathurst had promised her particular friends to discover whether anything suspicious was " meant " by Randal's frequent visits to the cottage. But in vain did she



descant upon Mr. Stanton's attractions, saying—

“It was so odd. He came here suddenly when he was most unexpected. You remember the uninhabited house, with closed windows and closed doors. It used to be the kingdom of silence; but one day in passing it I heard a noise. The doors were open—the workmen were hammering. They were actually shaking the carpets. It was no longer to be an uninhabited dungeon; the master was expected. And now Caerwyn only needs a mistress to grace it.”

Maitland neither coloured, nor took part in the conversation. It was useless to throw out plummet and line, or to attempt to sound her. What was really uncommon about the girl, was the perfect good sense which she showed in all her words and actions. Her matter-of-fact self-possession enabled her to calm her father, who, though he escaped to his bedroom when Mrs. Bathurst was seen approaching, exclaiming, “Dear me! here

comes the enemy!" and though he exclaimed pompously, when a note of invitation came for his daughter, "What have you done to these people, that they won't leave you alone?" was in reality scarcely able to conceal his elation at the unexpected turn which affairs had taken. And in the drawing-rooms to which Maitland was admitted, her manners were the same as they had been in her own home—at once naïve and reserved, with that singular mixture of perfect freedom and proud modesty, which made her shine amongst women who were more universally admired. The "little Gathorne," as the men called her, became a universal favourite, and Llandyffryn, having discovered that it had made a mistake, now took unusual pains to repair its error. But this sort of homage seemed to be either utterly indifferent to the girl, or her self-control was so perfect that, though Randal watched her every movement, he could never guess if she were flattered by the effect she produced. She dressed

as before, in the simplest materials, and though there was no denying that she would have looked better in finer gowns, yet she wore her plain dresses with such a natural grace that Randal was ashamed of himself for growing impatient of the sameness of the effect.

“So you are not quite superior to other women in not caring for dress?” he ventured to ask her one day when an old black silk which had been worn *ad nauseam* appeared, brightened up by a real flower, and even decorated with some of her home-made point-lace.

“Oh dear no,” she said quickly, “but I can’t afford to spend anything on it.”

The sincerity of the answer seemed to astonish him. She noticed the astonishment, and wondered whether it could be that he had not noticed how every possible saving was expedient, and whether she ought not to have spoken as honestly as she generally did.

If he had been speaking to another woman, he might have rejoined—

"*You* have not much need to adorn yourself." But when she explained with a rare blush and one of her ready smiles—

"I am poor, and I know how to accept the necessities of my position,"—he contented himself with thinking. "She has plenty of ready wit;" and dismissed the idea of making her an anonymous present of a new silk dress, as a thought to be ashamed of. His admiration of her was not even touched with a shade of pity. For it was impossible to pity a girl who never pitied herself, who was cast in such a fine mould of body and mind that she could make light of annoyances which would have worried the majority of her sex, and whose energy rose to meet every difficulty. The melancholy mist of sentiment which in her father's case seemed to have obliterated every pleasing recollection, met with such an entire contrast in the stronger-minded daughter that she was as far from nourishing any debilitating sense of misery as she was from looking forward

with any fearfulness to the tasks of her somewhat trying life.

"I would rather think of life than of death," she said, on one of those happy summer evenings, to Randal, who in a confidential moment had hinted at his former fit of despondency; "I believe neither in annihilation nor in salvation purchased by death in life. I want to make everyone happy because happiness is not criminal nor accursed by God."

And he, harping still on some of the horrors which had assailed him, added, with one of his shrugs, as if he wanted to shake her enthusiasm: "That is very well for you, because you are what is called 'religious.' All women are—it is very right and proper. But it is difficult to see what Christianity has done for the world. Tell me, for instance, if in this nineteenth century, with the light your religion has been supposed to bring, and with a civilization of which Europe is so proud, the wars of our period are not more horrible and atrocious than

ever? Tell me if the degraded state of the poor in our great cities, who are herded together like cattle with no resources but hellish amusements, is not infinitely worse than that of the savage beneath the open sky? No," he added moodily, "your religion has had its trial, and the world is neither better nor worse for it as far as I can see. Do you think I complain of it? Each system must have its day, and who would give a pin for a religion which did not number good women amongst its adherents?"

He thought he had daunted her, but he was a little surprised at the tone, neither terrified nor shocked, in which she answered as readily, in language which she was more accustomed to write than to speak.

"And tell *me* if you think that the insects which sport in the air, or the fishes which float in the water, have any right to complain because they do not understand all the mysteries of the air and the sea? A hackneyed illustration, I

know, but childlike similes are sometimes best when we have no right to ask for explanations. One day I believe I shall understand, and meanwhile, I don't trouble myself with analysing and dissecting. This I know, that men have been offered happiness, but it does not follow that they have accepted it."

"A lady's argument," he said lightly.

"No, it is not," she answered, more excitedly than he had ever before heard her speak. "Mysteries did I say—why everything is mysterious—the grass which we press beneath our feet—the sound of our own voices, which the air around us prolongs by its vibrations—the insect which floats in the atmosphere—the thoughts which occupy our minds at this moment. Your scientific men have names—names for everything—but behind the words—how little! And *I*—might I not as well attempt to empty the ocean by using a little mop to mop up the waves, as think I can explain difficulties which

the greatest philosophers can never explain?"

"You are hard on the naturalists and their meaningless nomenclature," he said, scarcely able to keep from laughing; and yet longing inconsistently to add at the same moment, "I am sick of my uncertainty, sick of the doubts which rise like mists between myself and that which I would gladly adore—wearied of wondering what I am—what my true existence—or my future life!"

Should he unveil to her, all at once, this weakness of character, and make a still more feeble exhibition of this inner self, which he was accustomed to keep decorously under lock and key? Should he say to her, "*You*, who call yourself poor—you are in a far healthier state, far richer than I am. I wish you could give me some of the alchemy which you carry in your eyes."

She evidently had no wish to continue the conversation. The day had been a warm one, but the sky was remarkably



clear, and it was one of those evenings in which no hour is so delightful as the sunset time. The sun was slowly sinking now, like a great ball of fire, bathing in its glow of colours this imaginary Eden, in which the serpent was temporarily quiescent. Ruby, amethyst, and sapphire, the colours were blended together over the distant mountains, and over the silver line of sea. A breeze, cool and aromatic, which had risen as the day declined, was beginning to stir the leaves of the trees with the faintest moans and tenderest sobs. The birds which had been chaunting to each other their antiphonial choruses, were now subsiding into sleepy silence, undisturbed by an occasional chirp or twitter, whilst a few pale glimmers of light were beginning to twinkle overhead, where soon the Bear would be shining out with the effulgent glitter of Cassopeia, and the brilliant belt of the milky-way. The hour, the evening, and the landscape were all calculated to heighten the sentiment which lay dormant in the man's nature. Since

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he had met Maitland Gathorne, a power like a divining-rod seemed to have quickened all that was best and most noble in his nature. He felt younger, brighter, and happier in every beat of his heart. And he caught himself thinking that he would rather be an uneducated labourer, working for his daily bread, under such influences as the present, than return to the life which had formerly seemed to be so enticing.

“Talk about ploughboys and clodhoppers,” he said, speaking his thoughts aloud, “I could imagine the most perfect form of happiness on earth to be found in these rural districts. The happiest of men may, after all be that bovine specimen of humanity who, without possessing the secrets of science, and working for his daily bread, may yet have a frequent consciousness of the beauty of this changeful scenery, and who, without being troubled by hazy reflections or vain speculations, may draw his happiness from the exercise of his bodily strength, and may live by

his heart and hands instead of by his brain."

Maitland smiled a meaning smile, and he caught himself thinking as he had thought before, how in spite of the absence of some of that physical perfection which men call beauty—hers was one of those tender, heavenly faces, with a delicate brightness about the tints and pure refinement of expression, such as Fra Angelico or Perugino loved to paint.

"That is so far true," she said softly, "that to be occupied is something. That man is a step nearer to finding the highest happiness who performs the first duty which is near to him honestly and conscientiously."

It was the sort of talk which in his boyhood he had been accustomed to call "jaw." A maiden aunt had once attempted it, and never repeated the experiment, but somehow it did not sound like disagreeable "jawing" from Maitland's lips.

They were walking in the garden near

the cottage, their shadows fitting beside them as they walked, with Steenie reclining on cushions on an arm-chair in the open air, and Mr. Gathorne pretending to write in the sitting-room, but napping over his writing. A little nettled by the motherly smile and quick aplomb with which she had turned the tables on himself, Randal swung his cane in the air, and struck off a few of the heads of the cheap pinks which grew in profusion in the straggling beds.

She winced, as he remembered she had winced once before over the ill-treatment of an unkempt dog.

"I can't bear to see flowers badly used," she said, with a look of vehement entreaty; "flowers have expressions in their faces like human beings."

"You were utilitarian just now," he retorted, with that faint little movement of the shoulders which had become habitual to him; "why not be equally utilitarian now? These pinks want thinning, and at least they are useless."

"Are flowers useless?" she answered indignantly. "Is colour useless? is everything that is bright and beautiful? *They* fulfil the purpose of their existence—by delighting the eye and filling the air with their fragrance. But it is doubtful if a man fulfils the purpose of his existence who——"

"Is not a ploughboy or a shepherd one of your great unwashed pets," he interrupted with a mock grimace.

"Well, at least, if you were a ploughboy you would have *something to do*," she continued, nothing daunted; "that would be better than hiding your talent in a napkin. How can anyone be happy who is aimless, purposeless, who——"

"How is it you come to know so much about me?" he interrupted again, silyly, hoping to startle her into self-consciousness, and to disturb that air of modest serenity which hung about her like a vestal garment.

"Why shouldn't I?" she answered quietly, without the faintest possible

change in the colouring of her cheeks, or the slightest inflection in the full tones of that rich voice, which annoyed him at that moment by its supposed patronising benevolence. "Why shouldn't I?—is it a punishable crime to notice and listen?"

"Generally a woman looks at her looking-glass and listens to her flatterers," he answered, parodying the remark of one of his favourite French authors.

"I don't believe it—but if so—I don't pretend to be like other women."

"It appears not," he said, with a partial return of his good humour. "Most women seem to think that language is given to them to conceal their thoughts; but whatever *you* think seems to come uppermost. You can find fault to people's faces."

"Isn't that better than finding fault behind backs?"

"Perhaps so," he answered, laughing; "you are like the nymph Egeria, and I think that Fénelon, who was so fond of lecturing, should have studied you

for his Minerva. No, you are certainly not like any other woman I ever knew."

He repeated the remark with several variations as he said to himself on his way home.

"I am a sybarite by nature, but she inoculates me with her earnestness. I feel as if some new blood had been injected into my veins whenever I have had a talk with her. No, she is certainly an original product of Nature in the feminine direction. She is frank without coquetry, and can talk sense without pedantry. I never met her equal."

## CHAPTER VIII.

MAITLAND'S words set Randal thinking. He had been half joking when he referred to that school of economists which holds that every man ought to give a portion of his time to labour. But he was not joking when he remembered that now his health was re-established, he might do something to remedy that apparently incurable tendency to loitering, which had made havoc of his time ever since he left college.

"I can't say that I understand poor people," he had acknowledged to the little reformer one day, and her honest voice had rung out just a trifle



louder than usual, as she answered him.

"That is a misfortune. A man who wishes to lead a happy, useful life in the country, ought always to interest himself in his poorer neighbours."

And when he had tried to excuse himself for his neglect by explaining,

"I cannot say that I find them interesting;" she added a little slyly, looking to see how he would bear it.

"Nothing is interesting that we do not understand," and had proceeded to enlarge on one of her favourite topics,—the kindness of the poor to each other, and their uncomplaining resignation.

Since then his ideas had wonderfully changed. He had even determined to build some model lodging-houses, as the best means of forming a tie which could not be too close between himself and the tenants he wished to benefit. He was convinced that marriage with a girl like Maitland might strengthen his

hands for good, and give a new meaning to his life. But it was by no means easy for him to speak to her on the subject, for a secret instinct warned him that there was something in her which he did not entirely understand. If she reciprocated the feeling which he began to entertain for her, it was evident that her regard did not destroy her clairvoyance. Not only was there an individuality about her which made her different from other people, and an occasional reserve which sometimes irritated him, but beneath all her outward amiability lay hidden a firm will, like the roots of a pine-tree hardly suspected beneath an outer covering of sand. Her indomitable energies which were brought to the surface in times of trouble, might be dormant at other times, like smooth pebbles sleeping at the bottom of a transparent stream. And yet the energies were always there—Maitland could never be easily managed like the majority of women.

It was the one characteristic which Randal would willingly have altered. She could generally think in the most exact manner, but he would have liked her better if she had failed to carry out some of her thoughts in their exactness.

"Are you sure," she asked, the first time he spoke to her in glowing, persuasive language, "sure that you love me as much as *that*?" And though her cheeks burnt with colour, and her eyes softened as she spoke, he thought he could detect the slightest possible ironical accent in her speech.

"As much as that!" he answered, repeating her words; "as if I could make you understand the poverty and inadequacy of my expressions."

"It is strange. You have not known me long."

"And yet my love has grown; it is not a sudden passion."

She was silent, and he fancied that she closed her lips a little more tightly. He was wounded and surprised, for in every

point of view he had considered that the marriage would be unexceptionable for her. His worldly position was sufficient—more than sufficient—to please her; indeed the advantages of the match might be looked upon as supererogatory. He did not know that if she had one thing more than another, it was the scorn of money. He had thought that she would certainly accept him at once, but now that the thing threatened to become difficult of achievement, it seemed to be so much the more to be desired. And as she stood before him in the June sunshine, with her head bent a little, with new and unexpected expressions coursing each other on her speaking face, in that interval of silence, which was only broken by the bleat of young lambs in a neighbouring field, the melodious rippling of the river, and a lark trilling in the sky, for once she more than satisfied his fastidious taste. Her slight figure, her shining hair, and the nobility of her well-shaped head, all pleased him as he looked

at her, and gave a point to her next objection.

"It is such a short time, and I—I have nothing to attract you. Everybody knows how plain I am."

"So you think you are ugly," he said, as he went off into a fit of prolonged, low laughter; "and you pay me the ill compliment of thinking that I must be incapable of appreciating your greatest gifts."

He tried to laugh, and yet he was uncomfortable in his laughter. A disquiet began to fill his heart—a fear that he should be unable to combat her objections, and this disquiet was by no means relieved when she answered gravely—

"You do not know my story, if you did you would not waste your words. You would know it is useless to speak to me on such a subject."

"No story will make any difference to me."

"But *it will*," she said decidedly; "you know nothing about us, and you

have made it your right to hear. It is never a pleasant thing to speak of oneself, but remember, you force me to it. When I was eighteen," she continued, after a pause, "I was sought in marriage by a man who pleased me—but—who left me when he heard that my father had more debts than capital."

"Wretch! I suppose you hated him as he deserved?"

"No, I was not angry, but I determined never to marry."

"Nonsense; you could never really have loved him."

"No; I opened my heart to him at first, but I was easily disenchanted. There was nothing in the circumstances around me to tend to keep up delusive fancies. I knew that we had an enemy. I had known it since childhood, but I was not prepared for the disaster that really happened. One day my father came home—very pale and haggard—as if he had been struck by some terrible blow, and took us away from the home we lived in.

There were cruel reports about him just then, but he never explained, and my mother begged me not to ask for an explanation. From that time the mysterious sadness of my father, and the increasing illness of my mother, made me forget about myself, and my own small troubles. But anyhow, I was thankful for my own escape. I could never understand a woman being broken by a thing of that sort. I only determined never again to venture the experiment."

"How illogical! how unworthy of you!" he interposed excitedly; "to condemn the whole of our sex because of one scamp."

"No, I condemn no one. My younger sister will marry. It was she who felt the change from our life in a city. Beautiful and good-tempered, with plenty of intelligence, it was natural that she should think about amusing herself, and love luxury a little. Her figure, her dress, her manners were always so ad-

mired. And for her sake I left my parents ; left my mother in her illness, to pass my time as a pupil-teacher at Hereford, that Rosette might go to a proper school. It did not answer. She was not happy, for at home she had been so flattered. At school she passed six weeks of every quarter in useless regrets ; six weeks in studying a little, because of my lecturing letters, and looking forward to emancipation. Now she is with an aunt—the only rich member of our family—who will probably adopt her. But I paid for her education dearly : my mother died during my absence, and I determined, when she died, never to leave my father.”

Her voice had dropped into a sad tone which was certainly not habitual to her, and it was in vain that Randal endeavoured to shake her resolution, declaring that Mr. Gathorne might possibly reside with them.

“No, no,” she said ; “there are my brothers. And my father would never be



happy if he were to change his way of life. I reproached myself about my mother. I will not reproach myself about him. When our parents are dead, it is then our most trifling negligences seem to be enormous."

"You are very energetic and serious, but this borders on the absurd. You injure yourself by your false and unnecessary idea of self-sacrifice. You ought to be as gay and exuberant as your sister, and so profoundly sensitive as you are to all the manifestations of true art—it is not fair for you to be condemned to this present narrow hard-worked life. It is ridiculous to talk about not marrying. If *I* cannot persuade you, there will be others to shake your resolution—others to help your brothers, to say nothing of your father. What if it turns out that *he* likes *me*, that he will favour my suit?" he continued, pouring out his words in excited entreaty.

"You do not know him," she said, with

a shake of her head. "He is not exactly like other people. But you need not pity me. Old maids can be very happy. I have, as you say, the tastes of a woman who has been delicately reared. Perhaps that is a misfortune. But what then? It only confirms me in my resolution. I always made up my mind that I would never marry for money. The only person who could meet me on an equality must of necessity be very poor; and certainly," she added, with one of her rare humorous looks, "I should not wish to marry in such a way as to have to haggle about every shilling. All my instincts would revolt at such an idea. Do you not see the logical conclusion? I am too proud for a life of grinding and bargaining, and too proud to abase myself to any-one."

"You a *woman*!" he exclaimed, indignantly, "you have an odd smile in speaking about things that make my heart beat as if it would suffocate me. But it

does not matter—I will not give you up.  
Sooner or later I shall turn the tables.  
Sooner or later I shall *make* you like  
me.”

## CHAPTER IX.

“IT would be better for us both perhaps, if I had less of the weakness of a woman,” Maitland sometimes thought to herself as the summer days passed on, and she felt her resolution failing, and her former indifference melting away. The more so that, goaded by her opposition, Randal became increasingly earnest, and felt as if he could sacrifice anything to carrying out his idea. She wished to make him understand his obstinacy, and to renounce it loyally of his own accord. But she was daily exposed to his incessant solicitation.

“You despise me, you hate me,” he

said to her one day, "and then you ask me why I suffer."

"It is cruel of you to say so," she answered, almost in tears; "you know I do not despise you. But I do not think I am suited to you, and there are so many circumstances against our marriage."

"Circumstances of your own invention," he answered, thinking her almost beautiful in this melting mood, though he had equally admired her reserve and her pride. "You have only to take the moral spectacles from your eyes, and these imaginary 'circumstances' will vanish like a flash of lightning."

"I can't think collectedly," she continued, in a tone more like complaint than any which he had heard her use before. "I have a difficult task, and you make it hard for me to perform it."

"And what must it be for *me*?" he asked; "I cannot bear it any longer—give me a promise in the light of day—in the sight of God, and do me justice.

Why impose this unnatural burden upon yourself? Why this silence?—this embarrassment? I did not ask you to marry me yet, I ask for the merest crumbs of comfort. Tell me that you will marry me some day, and I will be content to wait.”

The voice of the charmer began to be pleasant to her; she was losing her power of resistance, though she hardly knew it.

“Not yet;” she would say, shaking her head; “I would rather not promise yet.”

“What do you mean by not yet?”

“By and by—there is plenty of time.” But there was less of a fixed determination in her smile.

“Soon?” he would answer, seeing his opportunity and seizing it; and then she would reply,

“When I have had proper time to think of it.”

\* \* \* \*

The day came at last—the red letter

day, when she let him take her hand in silent pledge; but even then she smiled as if she wished to discourage any unnecessary sentiment.

"If I were sure that you would love me always," she said, looking at him searchingly.

"Of course I will love you always."

"I don't know. I am afraid sometimes; and the fear seems to nip my happiness in the bud. There may come a moment when you may wish to be free; I do not know how it is, but I have a sort of presentiment—a presentiment which after all is founded upon reason, because I think it strange you have not chosen some woman more beautiful and fascinating, or higher, say, in social position than I am."

"Hush—I will not hear you speak like that."

"If you do not like to hear me, is not that because there are some grains of truth in what I say? Think for a moment. As things stand at present it is pleasant

for me to receive proofs of your kindness and friendship. But supposing in the future that these things become necessary to me, that I learn to expect them and to exact them—ay, and even more, as my due—and that I expose myself to the possibility of being humiliated if they are withdrawn—withdrawn I mean, not intentionally, but in some manner you cannot help—I do not for a moment mean that you would not act as a man of honour. But some men, who marry women as unattractive as I am, are weary before their engagements are carried out; others are weary before they have been married six months. No, I think I would rather not risk the possibility of things being placed on that footing. At any rate there is no promise on *your* side—remember that you are free. I do not wish to shackle you by promises of any kind.”

He bit his lip as he answered,—

“You are very indulgent, and very determined to make yourself out un-



attractive. But when you really care for me you will throw away these scruples. You will be just as generous as you are now, but a little more like other people."

She was silent, as if revolving something in her mind, and then she shook her head, and repeated,

"I cannot help it. Perhaps it is because I have had such a hard education that this sort of happiness does not come naturally to me as it comes to other people. If you do not like our bargain, you must give me up; I have no more to say. Don't let us talk of promises on either side. I know myself, and I do not wish to bind you."

"Is it to be kept a secret?" he asked, evidently piqued.

"Perhaps—for my father's sake," she answered slowly, "it may be better not to mention it too suddenly. I do not wish, to make it a secret for my own sake, but for *his* and for yours. He has made up his mind to live and die in his present routine. He thinks his lot fixed; and he

could not give up his quiet habits. He would not know how to fill up the blank which would be caused by my absence. He has not only been used to my society, but I am his secretary. Let me wait till he is in a favourable mood, and then I will do my best to prepare him. For you see he knows nothing about our present compact, and he will think I am meaning to leave him *already*. If this is not fair to you, tell me at once. You know I shall not be offended if it makes any difference, but I cannot let you bind yourself till you have taken a little more time to think of it."

He only laughed at her, as she stood looking at him in that hesitating, half-patronising way, wrinkling up her eyebrows, and puckering up her forehead, and told himself that she was dearer to him even in that rather odd hesitation than a girl who could be taken captive more easily.

"She never thinks of herself, but only of that old fogey of a father," he thought,

as he laughed at the absurdity of the thing. "It is a bore, but a good daughter, they say, makes a good wife; at any rate, she is worth a hundred of the flirting, heartless women I used to know, women who had never known a cross or a strain, and who were as deceptive as Dead Sea apples when you had broken the rind."

He said he was contented, and he was so in a fashion. Whilst she, who had hitherto chosen for herself the harder way, was conscious of a tremor as she stepped into that unknown world which was opening with delightful vistas before her. Hitherto there had been a famine of laughter and sunshine in her life. But now, though she toiled as hard as ever, the sense of a dull routine seemed to have passed away, and she was conscious of a new life thrilling and vibrating through every nerve, with a feeling of glorious buoyant vitality during those happy summer days. A new mystic glory of love seemed to bathe her as in another atmosphere. Her utter want of artifice and her

inability to "act" made her unconscious that others might notice the change in her. The eldest of her brothers was expected home in the beginning of August, but she never expected that Harry would be struck by any difference in her manner. Her heart was so occupied that her other faculties seemed to be merged in feeling. It was as if her soul and her mind were suspended, while the things of the world moved in panoramic order before her like the appearances of a dream. Yet Llandyffryn seemed to have won a new magnificence during that summer. The sea shone and sparkled in the distance like a plain of sapphire, and the warm grey shadows on the mountains had never looked more exquisite, whilst something of the beauty of hill and dale and sky seemed to have passed into the countenance of the girl whose rugged, tender little face in childhood had thrown her mother into despair.

Maitland softened as if she grew younger, and was unbending in her new

happiness, till there were days when she began to think she had bound herself by unnecessary precautions. Oh, if she only dared to tell her father of her happy prospects! But then she reminded herself that it was *she* who had resolved to risk the consequences of perfect reticence, and that her own honour must be pure and untarnished in the compact. James Moorcroft was the first to guess at the existence of her secret, and though it was not a matter of the least surprise to him that another man should be preferred to himself, still he was but human. And the discovery came upon him so suddenly—he was seized with such cutting grief and such cruel jealousy, that it required more than earthly courage to enable him to keep silence,

“He is not worthy of her,” he said to himself, day after day as he tried to stifle his anguish. “She ought to marry somebody strong and true, but this fellow—he is in every way her inferior. He will never make her happy. I could have sur-

rendered her to anyone else with a better grace than to this town Lothario. But it is no business of mine. I was a fool to think I had a chance with her—I know it now.”

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Mr. Gathorne might have noticed the alteration in Maitland, but Harry's visit came as a welcome diversion. The boy was but eighteen, yet he had the character of a man. Since the death of his mother he and his father had contracted a strong personal affection for each other.

As a little fellow Harry had been beloved and bullied. He was always before other boys in his studies, but his shoes were down at heel, his neckties were untied, and his hair was generally unkempt. He still maintained something of this disreputable appearance, but sorrow had unexpectedly sobered and matured him. The barrier of boyish shyness had been necessarily thrown down, and his powers had been suddenly brought into play.

He was now looking forward to active life in the Indian Civil Service.

"He was not going to live upon his father and sister," he had announced in a majestic tone from the first; "not even if he had to emigrate to Australia, or to work his passage out as a common sailor."

Inglorious ease was hateful to Harry, for he thought not only of his personal needs, but of the needs of others. And now that he was likely to pass his examination with credit, he was full of brilliant prospects for his father and Steenie.

"Yes, you talk about remaining with him always, with the superfluous magnanimity of a girl," he said to his sister slily, one day. "But there will be no need for it, you know, when I can send for them both, and get them a comfortable berth at one of the hill-stations—amidst the loveliest scenery and the most exquisite climate in the world. *You* may be so fond of Old England, that you may want to remain in it for ever; there is no

accounting for women's vagaries," he added with a wink of his eye, which brought a pink flush on Maitland's cheek like the blush of a monthly rose.

"Castles in Spain!" she answered, playfully tapping his cheek, but she was hopeful, and it seemed to her that the engagement which existed at least on one side, might not be a long one after all.



## CHAPTER X.

THE time of idylls does not last for ever. Most of us, brothers and sisters, however prosaic we may be now, have had some such time of poetry in our lives, which we look back upon in after years, sometimes with superior smiles, and sometimes with vain regrets, when we know that our June roses have blown and withered for ever.

The summer days were passing at Llandyffryn, the days which Randal Stanton rejoiced to see the look of love which Maitland's pure, true eyes revealed ; the days in which he would say to her, a little triumphantly—

"You do not hide your heart from me *now*. You have plenty of strong feeling hidden beneath that quiet manner of yours. I ought to have known that you had."

And when she would answer, turning round upon him, kindling and fervent—

"If I love you why should I say that I do not? I never could see why women should be untruthful, just because they care for a man. I am not going to perjure myself by declaring that I hate you."

And yet, as a French writer puts it, "Nobody remains in the middle of a week;" and so, after a little interval of delicious slumber, Maitland's intellect awoke, and with a new inquietude attempted to scrutinize the mystery of this happiness. She was not a child—not an optimist—but a reasonable woman. She was not accustomed to see beauty in everything which she loved, but where there was darkness, she would illuminate the darkness by her sorrowful pity. And

so, even in these days of bright sunshine and happy fancies, she was never a foolish woman worshipper, seeing no faults in her idol because she loved it. She saw Randal's faults plainly enough, and tried very honestly to amend them, sighing no more for her solitary existence, but not deceiving herself about her lover's imperfections. And, perhaps, of all the positions in which a high-souled girl can stand towards a man, there is none more attractive than that in which a measure of the maternal love is mixed. Randal, in his more extravagant moods, thought of his future wife as his tutelary angel, and though he had still scarcely patience to consider that hesitation in so important a matter as marriage was honourable to a woman, he had gained something of Maitland's unselfishness from constant association with her, and something which, if it could not be called religion, was yet a yearning after an ideal higher than himself—an appreciation of

moral beauty which raised and purified him.

They say that "good reigns" are like blank pages of history, and happy love is like good reigns. It keeps events at a distance, and delights itself in what the world calls emptiness. But there came a time, when the uniformity of these bright days was to be interrupted.

One evening, when Maitland was returning to the cottage, after an excursion in the neighbourhood, to which she had taken her brothers as usual, and had met Mr. Stanton also as usual, she was startled by hearing voices in the sitting-room. She hesitated in the porch without any intention of listening, and the words reached her ears, uttered in a loud and threatening voice—

"In a few more months the five years will be at an end, and I shall come again to demand the interest of my money. Don't talk to me about mercy; my terms were very merciful ones!"

She did not hear her father's answer, but the strange voice repeated again—

“Speak lower! No, I will not speak lower. Why should I speak lower? I do not care if everyone hears; *I* have nothing to be ashamed of. It is *you* have reason to be ashamed, not I—you, who have disgraced yourself and your family. You know what you did once, when you found out that you were dishonoured. Instead of rising above the dishonour, you endeavoured—weak creature that you were—to drown the memory of it in drink. You brought your wife to an early grave; and even now the curse is not removed. Is it fair that *my* life should be blasted, and that you should be allowed to go scot free? Nothing about me has prospered since the death of my child. I have married again, but I was ill-fated in my second marriage, and I am still a childless man. There has been no publicity—no open scandal, I have spared you all that. But I will have my revenge, or rather Nature will

have it. Drop by drop, little by little, the curse will act as it has acted already. You, like myself, have caught at reeds, not ropes ; all your hoped-for successes have slipped away from you ; all your schemes have resulted in nothing but failure : and the curse will rebound still on your innocent children, making them wither, as if a poisonous Upas tree were over them. As to *you*, you are beneath my contempt. Even now, if I were to leave you alone, you would not think of making an effort to retrieve your position. You would be a conceited dreamer, dreaming vain dreams. You have one foot in the grave already, but your self-conceit is not yet outraged at the pitch you have so often touched. You never cared for what *I* suffered, or cared only with the counterfeit grief of a man who hasn't it in him to feel for one of his fellow-creatures. Even now, you think only of yourself. You are writing the rubbish you call "poetry" still, and the intoxicating hopes and fancies which lure men on even in

decay and disease, would lure you still, if it were not for your children."

The involuntary eavesdropper stood hesitating, with her hand on the latch of the door. Should she check herself, and remain hidden still for her father's sake, or should she hasten into the room speaking confusedly in her turn, and telling of what she had heard? At one moment she thought of rescuing Mr. Gathorne from a perilous interview with a madman, and at the next instant she suspected a part of the truth, putting things together, and working out a plausible theory in her own mind.

She had not long to wait, for after a few more murmured sentences, the door was suddenly flung open, and a man with whitened hair, shrunken face, and leathery skin, whose hands were tightly clenched, and whose brows were knit together, passed her with rapid footsteps, taking no notice of her whatever, but turning sharply round as if to avoid her as he strode towards the garden-gate.

She went timidly into the sitting-room, where in the morning she had left her father busy with one of Horace's Odes, manipulating what he called a translation. He was sitting at the table, still erect, as she had left him. But the miserable stuff which he *would* indite in spite of his previous experiences, and which would speedily have been consigned to some limbo, had he chanced to find a publisher for it, had dropped from his trembling hand. The ink-bottle was overturned and a black stream was trickling unheeded over the lace trimming of the pretty tablecloth. Mr. Gathorne was not pale like his visitor, but his complexion had deepened into an apoplectic red, and his veins were swollen while some strong emotion which he could not control, shook him from head to foot.

It was singular and rather alarming, but Maitland did not easily lose courage. Her mental condition was still clouded and confused, and she was groping for some elucidation of this unexpected mys-



tery. But the strong part of her character, her love of protecting all weak things from oppression and tyranny, had been aroused by the morose words and vindictive looks of the visitor. If her father had not the moral courage to free himself from his tormentor, she had already determined to take the initiative.

"Why did you admit that strange man? I should have cautioned you, dear. Another time when we go out, you must have the garden-gate locked," she said, hastening to wipe up the ink, and to restore the displaced manuscript. "It is unbearable that you should be exposed to the impudence of such intruders."

"Why should I not have a visitor?" he answered her moodily, as soon as he could speak. "I had my friends in past times. Why should I not have them now?"

He looked anxiously at her, in spite of the angry words by which he had attempted to hide his sense of danger and fear of detection, determining that *she* at

least should not discover that anything was wrong.

"A friend!" she repeated quietly; "rather a strange friend! I hope you will not feel any vexation at my telling you that I heard——"

"Heard *what*?" he interrupted, in a voice which was almost strangled in his throat. "You are a true daughter of Eve, women are all alike."

The caustic speech was so unusual to him, that she shrank from it as she answered,

"I could not help hearing, dear, I did not mean to vex you. You do not suppose that I believed half I heard."

It was not in her to conceal anything, but as she forced out the words she saw that he was angry with her for her supposed espionage. Till then she had not judged him hardly, but she lost faith in him as he bent towards her, repeating in that hoarse voice, scarcely above a whisper,

"You perfectly understand that if you heard anything it is *a secret*." Something

seemed to give way within her, like the snap of a string in a musical instrument, and though she motioned her assent to the embargo he laid upon her, she was conscious of a sort of shiver. It was the first shadow which had come between the father and the daughter ; the first rift within the lute.

## CHAPTER XI.

THAT night Maitland was late at her work, trying to divert her mind from the anxieties which began to weigh upon her. The clock from the old church had struck the hour of twelve when she lay down to rest, and fell at last into a troubled sleep. The recollection of her father haunted her dreams, and she thought she heard him enter her room, and had an idea he had been looking at her in her sleep.

She woke and found herself alone, but a few instants afterwards she heard a deep sigh—a sigh which reminded her of other sighs which she thought she

had heard in her dreams. She crept to the door of her father's room, and was surprised to see bright candle light streaming through the chinks of the door.

"Father—are you ill?" she asked, but there was no answer, and she had not courage to repeat the question.

When she woke in the morning her terrors had fled. But her anxiety had been too great for her, and she looked tired and depressed. She forgot to dress her hair carefully as usual before she met her lover, forgot to be fearful as she had been but a few days before, lest her appearance should be too rustic to please his fastidious taste.

But Randal had seen the light burning late from her lattice-window, and presuming on her increasing meekness, he was determined to lecture her on the subject. He began to think it was pleasant to be comparatively rich, when another, so dearly loved, was poor. What joy could be greater than that of being able to surround the woman he

intended for his future wife, with all the refinements of luxury, of being able to prove to her how much he thought of her smallest comforts, of sparing her all trouble, and satisfying her every taste, and of interposing with his assistance when anything was likely to hurt her? Would not his fortune, though a small one, enable him to do this? He had determined no longer to allow Maitland to exert herself in any way. That a woman to whom he was engaged to be married should work for her living was absolutely intolerable. He had found out about the writing, and it worried him a good deal; seeing that he had never condescended to use his own hands for anything.

He was ashamed to think of the labour which Maitland had hitherto been allowed to attempt, for a remuneration which he considered to be contemptibly small.

“A woman, even when she deserves it, is sure never to be paid well,” he said when he tried to induce her to

leave her tiresome occupation—an occupation which he hated all the more virulently because it reflected on his own idleness, and robbed him of her leisure.

“It is not worth calling a life—the fagging life you lead !”

“It is much like the life of all other workers,” she answered cheerfully, “and how do I know yet but that I may continue to be a worker? Remember our compact. Your affection has not yet been tested. This may be one of its tests.”

He paid no attention to her allusion, but continued indignantly,

“It is quite absurd when you come to think of it. Why, I positively believe I have spent as much in one year on my horses as you manage to earn in the course of a twelvemonth !”

“Very likely,” she answered quietly ; “there are relative proportions in everything. Do you despise me because I earn so little ?”

"Not at all," he answered, a little irritably; "but I am sorry for you—awfully sorry! A girl ought to live like a flower in the air and sunshine, with no more care for the necessities of life than the lilies of the field."

"With no more *anxiety* I grant you," she answered seriously.

"I want you to enjoy yourself more."

"People's ideas about enjoyment differ."

"*Your* ideas of enjoyment are to wear yourself to fiddle-strings in your spare hours for all the brats about the place, and all the rheumatic old beldames too—ruining your health as if you were a curate."

"*Do* curates ruin their health?" she asked laughing. "Take care; *you* may get your Nemesis in the form of rheumatism one of these days."

"But the kids don't get rheumatism," he answered, sending a stone spinning from a spiteful kick into a neighbouring puddle; "*they* at least are not your business."

"Oh, if you come to that, we are all of



us each other's business. How can one bear to hear of the Good Shepherd giving up His life for the sheep, without going in search of the lambs for whom He died?"

He was silent. For if *his* oratory had been wasted on her he found it as difficult to understand *her* words.

"We look at things from different ends of the telescope," she thought, with a sigh. The joy-bells were already ceasing to ring in her heart, and she was thankful to remember that she had accepted no definite promises from him when she found her father that evening in a fresh state of despondency.

"Rosette is coming home," were the first words with which he greeted her. "The girl has ruined her prospects for life. Your aunt would have done well for her, but your sister has made a mess of things, as she always does; she has allowed some idiot whom your aunt favoured to fall in love with her, and then she has refused him, and that cat of a

woman turns round on her, and sends her home as if she had disgraced us; writing that my girl 'gives herself airs, and is grossly impertinent,' &c., &c. There, take the letter and read it for yourself! It makes me perfectly sick. She calls our Fairy 'a silly young woman,' and says she is 'very extravagant,' when it is your aunt herself who taught her extravagance, and who ought to have paid for her extravagances. Rosette will never have such another opportunity. If your aunt had had a bevy of daughters of her own coming on, she might have considered it good policy to get rid of Fairy. But as it was, the course was clear before the girl. She has acted like a fool. What possessed her to encourage the confounded donkey, if she did not mean to marry him?"

"I don't believe Rosette could help it," answered Maitland thoughtfully, ignoring the pet name by which her father called her sister. "She never *can* prevent the men from falling in love with her."

"So long as men will find the aping of

imbecility charming," added Mr. Gathorne, severely, not meaning it in the least.

He generally doated on his younger daughter, and even in his temporary fits of irritation, was like those mothers who beat their own children, but will not allow other people to lay a finger on them.

"You find it charming too, and you would find it twenty times more charming, if you happened to be thirty years younger. You know as well as I do that Rosie is invaluable as a bright thing in a house, and that few people can resist anyone who is gay and sunshiny," rejoined Maitland, with a little sigh, for which she would have found it difficult to account. "It must have been very dull for her, you know, at aunt's. Aunt is so gloomy—so implacable when she is offended. It must always have been a state of painful subjection for Rosette. I think it has been very good of her to bear it as she has done."

"Ah, but you don't realise it—it is misery—how are we to keep her?" and

Mr. Gathorne shivered. To have his younger daughter returned so suddenly penniless on his hands, after the ominous prophecies of the preceding day, gave him a strange feeling of superstitious dread.

"Perhaps aunt will change her mind," answered Maitland cheerily. "She will find a difference without Rosette—you may be very sure of that." And taking up a little note which was addressed in her sister's handwriting to herself, she carried it up into her bedroom to feast on it in solitude.

No, Rosette was not to blame. She was more and more sure of it as she read the words,

"You must not fret about it, dear—you know I could not help it. Aunt and I have quarrelled hopelessly at last. She has called me names, and I have retorted in her own Billingsgate. Aunt hates me now. All the king's horses and all the king's men can't undo that fact; so there is no use in fretting about it. I should be

in despair at the thought of causing you grief, but human patience could hold out no longer; and you know I never pretended to be a saint. Aunt's tyranny has become so terrible, I can no longer submit to it—and, oh! the house is so dismal since she gave up her fashionable parties, and took to religious meetings. I should not mind it if she practised what she preached, but she is just as selfish as she was before—only a little bit frightened about the other world. She wants to fit me with any strait-waistcoat she chooses for me, and forgets that *I* am not worn-out, and just tottering into the grave—and that life would be nothing to me without company, and stir, and movement.

“I have refused her favourite clergyman, but it is not because I am sentimental. You know I was never impetuous or violent in my feelings. And I am not at all ambitious. I sometimes fancy I should be perfectly content with an ordinary comfortable middle-class existence, if I could only enjoy myself in it—so

you need not be anxious about me. I have no strong prejudices, but I cannot let myself be sold. I seldom hate people, but I happen to hate the man whom aunt has kindly selected to be my master—body and soul—I hate and detest him, and must escape from him at all risks. I have expressed my hatred to him boldly, and then aunt tells me that her friends laugh at me for my impertinence.

“‘You should not give yourself airs, and so let other people have occasion to laugh,’ she says.

“‘So much the worse for the laughers. Let those laugh who win; it is people yellow with jealousy who laugh at others,’ I tell her; and then she adds sarcastically,

“‘How do you propose to keep yourself at home? At my house you have done nothing—I offered you masters, but you were lazy and would not practise, would not sketch, and would not learn languages. If you mean to earn your own living, you ought to have a special

education, and it is your *own* fault you have not had it.'

"Do you think, Grannie, dear, I can bear this spite any longer, this constant friction of incompatible tempers—as you would call it? No; shall I tell you a secret?—Once aunt,—do you remember it? in her brighter days took me on a tour through Italy, and, as we walked through the interminable picture-galleries, and admired the celebrated statues, now and then I was weary of it, and caught a reflection of my own face and figure in a glass. And then—I could not help it—it dawned on me, for the first time, that the features of *my* face, and the outlines of *my* figure, had something in common with those celebrated masterpieces of form and colour which still send gaping crowds of connoisseurs into raptures. Do you call me very vain? I don't think I am vain at all. I don't think I care much about it. I am simply stating a fact. Why should I work at music, or fag at languages, if

Nature has kindly given me my fortune in my face? Why, even during my stay at aunt's dreary house, if she had chosen to let me be tolerably civil to any of them, I might have had twenty men, at least, at my feet. She dismissed them all in favour of her austere Malvolio, and now Malvolio is raving about me. No, I am not the least bit anxious. I require very little—some birdseed and water, and plenty of room to hop about, and nobody must clip my wings. You will not have to keep me long. I shall marry as soon as I can—a moderately poor man, if I can't get a rich one; but one who will let me have my own way, and that I don't despair of finding, even at Llandyffryn.

“ Believe me,

“ Your affectionate sister,

“ MARY ROSETTA GARTHORNE.”



## CHAPTER XII.

“**I** SUPPOSE it is true, but it sounds strangely as she puts it,” thought Maitland, with a little sigh, as she finished her sister’s characteristic letter.

She saw the position, and was startled by it. For what *could* Rosette do to earn her own bread? Absolutely nothing. She was bound to confess it, holding colloquy with herself, and apologising for her sister’s common-sense way of stating the only other alternative. Put nakedly before her, the necessity revolted her, and yet Rosette’s way of dealing with the problem was, after all, only matter-of-fact and practical. Fortunately it had

nothing in common with the vulgar, unmaidenly talk about "lovers" and "admirers," which from her heart Maitland hated. No more in common than her sister's dainty wardrobe, which had been sent on in anticipation of its owner's arrival, had with the smart, vulgar style of dressing, which was considered stylish by the farmer's daughters in the neighbourhood of Llandyffryn. And as Maitland unpacked her sister's boxes, folding and refolding the simple, elegant materials, caressing the embroidered petticoats, and lingering over the fine lace, as if all these accessories were a part of Rosette's very self, she pictured the owner of these delicate properties, just as she had seen her last, fresh and radiant as the morning, and made abundant excuses for her natural vanity, remembering the constant praises which from her childhood she had heard of her own charms, with but little mental balance for the evil.

A week of premature heat preceded Ro-

sette's arrival, and on the morning late in June, when she was expected at the cottage, there was a soft summer rain pattering on the parched ground. It had rained all the night, and the few visitors, who, at this early season of the year, had already arrived at Llandyffryn, remained cooped up in their lodgings, watching the showers as they beat against the roofs of the houses, or formed little pools in the stony roads. A grey mist veiled the distance, where the sea was moaning drearily against the rocks. But towards the close of the day a fresh wind sprang up. There were great rifts in the thick clouds, and the sun ventured to show its face. Everything began to glitter, burnished by the recent rain. The wind chased the remaining clouds away, and the sky became of a pure and limpid blue. The motionless verdure of the closely-cropped hay-fields, and the agitated verdure of the wind-blown trees, shaking from their branches great diamond drops of rain, seemed to have received from the

inexhaustible palette of Nature fresh tints of green, whilst the emerald hues were repeated in yet another variety, by the distant waves of the ocean, rolling in with fringes of foam.

Life and beauty had returned with the sunlight, whilst the fresh, drying wind was good-naturedly preparing the roads for tourists, and inviting the pedestrians to go out.

Randal prepared to follow their example, and remembering some mild hints which he had received from Maitland lately, on the subject of his favourite "far niente," he armed himself with a little hammer, and a tin box for botanical specimens; the first step towards some proposed scientific investigations. In theory it had been easy for him to plan an austere life, devoted more or less to such investigations: six months to be given to botany, six more to comparative anatomy, and another six months to the fauna of antediluvian animals; easy for him to be thankful for the fact, that the

small fortune which he had come into on his majority, would enable him to prosecute all these studies, and yet to marry. But the first attempt at putting these theories into practice brought disillusion.

"It is all bosh," he said to himself after a little while spent in examining the abundant wild flowers, picking the petals and stamens from them; and knocking gingerly at the rocks. "I have about as much vocation for researches of this sort, as I have for explorations into the heart of Africa. As if it signified two pins what the flowers are called, or whether the rocks are limestone or quartz. She may say what she pleases, but it is a decided waste of time to be *doing* anything at all on evenings like these."

And then, drawn as if by instinct to the neighbourhood of the cottage, he chose a pathway half up the hill from which he could see the distant view, and which was yet so near to the old

church, that "God's acre" was only divided from it by a low stone wall—a wall covered in this month of June with a thick mantle of vegetation, throwing out everywhere interminable boughs and suckers. The pathway wound through a little copse of pine-trees and mountain ash-trees, with a thick carpet of cones and moss, which was one of Maitland's favourite retreats. The arrowy lights were piercing through the foliage of the pine-trees, and the leaves of the ash-trees were still trembling in the wind, as Randal threw himself in a listless attitude on this comfortable carpet—his languid limbs outstretched, and his elbow resting on a piece of rock—idly playing with the cones, which he collected into a heap, and then tossed away from him like a child, unconscious of what he was doing, as he looked out in a reverie on the prospect.

He was thinking of a recent interview with Maitland, in which the grief about her father, which she had endeavoured

to hide from him lately, had been so evident that he had asked her for an explanation.

“Don’t you know how I warned you?” she said, looking at him sadly; “and, after what I told you, cannot you understand that there may be family troubles—troubles very hard to bear—but which I cannot possibly explain to *anyone*. You may be sure I shall not wonder,” she continued after a pause, “if these troubles cause an alteration in your plans.”

“Nonsense!” he said, without a minute’s hesitation. “I know you only speak from motives of delicacy. But does not your own good sense tell you, that you ought to be still dearer to me from the troubles you bear so bravely?”

She had held out her hand to him; he had seized it and pressed it. Her voice had trembled, and her eyes had moistened.

“I have not yet the right to oppress

you with my griefs," she had faltered. And he had tried to think that he respected her the more—tried to fancy that nothing gave him a higher idea of her value, than her behaviour at this crisis. Struck in some way in which she could not explain, in the full flight of her new happiness, she had fallen to the ground without a murmur—hiding her wound from curious eyes. She had shewn an exquisite reticence in concealing her vexation,—a reticence which he believed to be rare in her sex, and he tried to appreciate her reserve all the more, from the fact that he had a horror of the pathetic and turbulent demonstrations which many women are ready to make on the slightest occasion.

"She asks me why I love her," he thought to himself, "and it would be very easy for me to tell. Always before I met her I had associated selfishness and excitement with what people call 'love.' I had no 'ideals' then, but the passion of



human love and the highest ideal of life seemed to me irreconcilable. I could perfectly believe how the best of men must have hard struggles between the two feelings. But this girl has made me feel how it is possible to love a woman with all the ardour and dignity of one's soul. Maitland is lovely because she is true, she is beautiful because she is so pure. With her it is possible to reconcile love and respect, earnestness and peace."

He could thus philosophise about his love, dissect it and tear it into tatters, as if he were unconsciously wishing to strengthen a flagging resolution. He knew nothing of self lost and found again in the being of another, in the serenest ecstasy of which the merely human are capable, but he did not like acknowledge to himself the smothered resentment, which he was trying to bury deep down in his heart at the mysterious earnest purpose in the life of the woman he was to call his wife.

The sunset promised to be magnificent.

Already the horizon had become purple with zones of opal and rose-colour, and there were tracks of glory in the sea, making it glisten like waves of gold against the sinuous outline of the distant coast. "How lovely!" said a fresh young voice, rousing him from his reverie by those dulcet tones which, however often they may be described in books, are seldom heard in real life; "I don't generally care very much about scenery, but I certainly did not know that you had anything so beautiful to show in the wilds of Llandyffryn."

At the same instant he heard footsteps approaching; wondered languidly if he should move, and then remembered that he was protected from observation by the trees. At the next moment he heard a ringing laugh, and being conscious of a little curiosity as to the possibility of the bird-like voice and that mirthful laughter proceeding from the same lips, he raised his head to look, and saw in the uncertain evening light coming slowly up the path-

way a girl in a white dress, with a slim and willowy form, who walked with lingering steps, looking up at the trees, and laughing when the drops of rain, which had been hanging like pearls at the extremities of the leaves, fell on her upturned face. The wind which played with the folds of her muslin dress and traced the outlines of her slender figure seemed to have loosened some of her hair, which waved in pretty drifts on her shoulders. He could not see the face plainly enough to distinguish the features, but the sound of the laugh told him that there were dimples on the rounded cheeks, and that a merry smile was parting her lips, so that everything about her seemed to be supple and vivacious.

Suddenly she paused, resting her elbows on the low wall, and said to an old man who was following her at a little distance,

“Why didn’t you tell me that this was a churchyard?” and a rapid shudder ran through her at the sight of the graves.

Every trace of animation seemed to have gone out of her voice, as she added in a tone of reproach,

“What a morbid idea to choose this place for a walk! People say that we are all mortal, but do any of them ever realise it till the time comes for them to die? I declare there is the tombstone of a girl—only nineteen. Let us go—I have had enough of it.”

And turning to her companion with a little imperious gesture, she retraced her steps down the pathway, more rapidly than she had come, the floating folds of her light dress brushing Randal's feet, as she passed him. He was conscious of an odd thrill as the muslin touched him.

“Maitland's sister,” he said to himself to explain the sensation, “for that was Maitland's father to whom she gave her commands as if she were a sultana, and it is something quite uncommon for the old fellow to hobble out with anyone. She must be a strange contrast to my quaint Minerva; very frivolous and childish

I should think—but of course I must have a brotherly feeling for the girl. I hope she won't prove a tyrant to her unselfish sister."

And though he told himself that this "new importation," as he called it, was rather a bore than otherwise, and that he could not possibly be curious about it, still, he thought it might be better to get the meeting over, and lounged towards the cottage later in the evening.

Then came the full surprise. For though Randal had heard all the stories of Rosette's attractiveness, though he had been told till he was tired of hearing it, that even when Rosette had been but fifteen she could not be taken to any place of amusement without exciting a little murmur of admiration, very dear to her mother's heart, still, he had accepted all these supposed myths with due reservation. He had seen her photograph, but the photograph had given him no idea of the beauty of her colouring, and he was

by no means prepared to see by the full light of the candles, a young girl of so rare a beauty that he could scarcely keep back an exclamation of admiration.

Rosette met him with a little inclination of the head, which told nothing of the self-consciousness kept as an expensive substitute for simplicity, which when it had been shewn more openly by coarse-minded or less artistic women, he, in his former life had been accustomed to resent. He had a horror of attitudinising. But it is only a careless painter who lets the outline of his finished pictures be seen, and every attitude in which Rosette put herself, was so naturally easy, without one fold of drapery awry, or one gesture overstrained, that that man must have been a skilful adept indeed in the ways of the sex, who could have guessed that the girl had been trained and drilled in pretty ways from her earliest years, till her simplest action had become an unconscious rehearsal of some graceful instruction.

Did it occur to Randal, as he looked at her that he, in common with most other men, shared a sort of sensitiveness on the subject of physical comeliness, which though he strove against it, so that it had been lately in abeyance—might, after all be difficult to subdue?

But Rosette forming her conclusions from a previous data, could calculate almost too a nicety the impression she should make, and was too well used to the eager stare of the young imbeciles who called her “an awfully pretty girl,” to have any unreasoning shyness about her. She was perfectly aware that her hair—which was of the tint which the French term “*blonde cendrée*,” and which had soft golden tints in it, and was so luminous in colour that at almost every movement of her head, it seemed to give out rays of light, was dressed so negligently in its surprising abundance, that no one could doubt it belonged to herself; that her complexion which owed nothing to

any artifice of the toilette, had an unusual purity of colour beneath its shell-like transparency, and that her great velvety eyes, shaded by their long lashes, had the power of changing to almost every tint of blue, from the clear cerulean of the sky, to the darker shade of the slaty stream. Probably she was tired of hearing of these perfections, but her certainty of possessing them, added to the naïve piquancy of her manners, and to the happy music of her young and fresh laughter. Her rosy mouth had something mutinous and mocking about it, and seemed to be as rebellious against all constraint, as the fair hair which was continually escaping from her comb and falling in masses down her back.

“If she had only a mind which harmonized with the loveliness of her features. But there is no depth in the expression of the face—it is nothing in repose,” thought Randal as he listened to the continual current of chatter and laughter which the newcomer was keeping up with her de-



lighted listeners, and wondered vaguely if this fresh young nature would be able to infuse a little hope into the father's character, which had lately appalled him with its grim and continual hopelessness.

"You had *one* pearl before," he said, adapting himself to Mr. Gathorne, in his use of flowery language; "and now you have two—you are a lucky fellow."

It was an evening of strange contrasts, with suicidal moths dashing in against the lights, and with great chaffers booming lazily by the open windows, in the little strip of garden, which had been so lately burning with the summer heat, that all Maitland's cheap flowers had died a premature death, and little else was left but tussocks of dry grass; with Harry's big dog giving every now and then a threatening growl, as if it saw imaginary cats in the twilight; with the elder sister anxious and careful, like Martha in the gospel narrative, while the younger one who

had travelled since the early morning, looked exquisitely cool and comfortable. She had the air of a Princess, and was strangely out of keeping with the rest of the family group. So much so, that the whole place which had looked picturesque enough before, seemed now to be poor and old-fashioned in consequence.

## CHAPTER XIII.

“**H**OW are you to hope to amuse her here?” asked Randal Stanton, a few days afterwards, with some anxiety in his manner.

“Amuse! Why should she need amusement? A merry heart goes all the day.” Rosette was always a living illustration of Queen Elizabeth’s words: “They pass best over the world who trip over it lightly, for it is but a bog; if we stop, we sink.”

There was a weary ring in Maitland’s frank voice, for it seemed to her that lightheartedness might be a little overdone, and her lover’s words jarred on her

in a way she could not have explained. Her own anxieties were very pressing just at this crisis, and much as she envied the calm philosophy which could sit cosily in its arm-chair, proving that money was a mere phantasm, she knew that her father was in need of substantial aid for some emergency, and wondered how she could give it him, and yet purchase the necessities of their every-day life.

Under any circumstances she would not have taken Randal Stanton into her confidence, but she was still less inclined to do so now. For there was a very perceptible shade of difference in his manner to her lately, and she resented the fact that he united with Rosette in rallying her on her industry.

"I am glad you have not Maitland's passion for being of use. I hate the very word 'use;' it is a weak generation that will fuss and agitate itself," he had declared on more than one occasion, when the younger sister had rallied the elder

one for sitting up writing, or pricking her fingers over continual needlework.

"Don't do it," the girl would say; "it makes you look like a lady's maid." Or she would add, laughing, "You will ink your fingers;" or "I wonder if you will ever let yourself have any beauty-sleep?"

"Can one maid-of-all-work do everything? Maids-of-all-work are proverbially inefficient," Maitland had asked her in desperation that very morning, when her conscience condemned her for departing from her usual rule, and letting Randal tempt them out for a walk before her duties were over.

It was a dull July day. There was no freshness in the air, and after they had toiled up the hill to look at the view on which the Llandyffryn people justly prided themselves, the prospect had been pronounced by Rosette to be "one of those mappy views in which nobody can see anything, and about which you are sure to vex somebody or other by not

saying you see thiugs impossible to be seen."

Randal Stanton had politely agreed with her in condemning the panorama, which he had often admired before, though it had infinite gradations of tone and colour in it, till Maitland—to whom the mysterious beauties of the distant view never appealed in vain—felt driven to interrupt them by declaring that it would be lovely if they saw it later in the evening.

"There has always been a mist whenever I have seen it," said Rosette, with a shrug.

"It is prospectively good—as so many people are—looking forward to a future which hardly ever comes," interposed Randal, quietly.

"That is what some gentleman in 'Martin Chuzzlewit' would call 'dreadful true!'" answered the girl, with her ringing laugh, and pronouncing the ugly English words with that soupçon of foreign manner which she could playfully put on

whenever it suited her. "But shall I tell you a little secret? I like that sort of people a good deal better than the very good ones."

"Do you?—that's a comfort. They live in a Fool's Paradise—well it seems Paradise to them all the same. Would they be happier if the mist cleared away? These are riddles I don't pretend to solve."

"Don't try to solve them. Wait till you are old—I wonder how it will feel to grow old," chimed in Rosette, with one of her coquettish little attempts at being thoughtful. "I can fancy being a nice old grandmother, with white cap and pretty apron; but I should hate to be middle-aged, it is neither one thing nor the other. Though if I am to lead a quiet, steady-going life in a place like this, I suppose I shall soon begin to feel as dried-up as an Egyptian mummy."

"I thought you said you liked Llandyffryn when you came here first," Maitland reminded her reproachfully.

"Did I? Then I was driven to fibbing," said the incorrigible Rosette, with an air of the greatest naïveté; "I would have said I liked purgatory to get away from Aunt. But I don't like it *now*," she continued, shaking her head with an odd little cough; "I am certain that there are vapours round these valleys which are dangerous to delicate throats, and I must get some lozenges to protect my voice. And then," she added hesitatingly, "you must admit that there is nothing but very second-rate society, in which you have to remember your ps and qs; and before Aunt grew so solemn I used to go out a great deal. I must confess I don't like your humdrum little gatherings."

"We might get up some balls," suggested Randal.

"Fine balls!—balls without men," she answered contemptuously, with a little mouth that looked as if it could not melt butter. "I tell you frankly I like gentlemen's society much better than that of



ladies. Women are all so jealous—men are infinitely superior.”

To Maitland it seemed a very mal-a-propos speech, but Mr. Stanton looked as if it exalted Rosette in his eyes.

“But there are *men* at Llandyffryn,” he answered, laughing, “as well as the worthy matrons who mind their ps and qs, and who no doubt would dislike *you*, or anything pretty and unconventional, without being able to state the causes of their antipathy, knowing little in their straightlaced Pharisaism of anything but their own narrow fancies. What do you say to the men?”

“Boorish, boorish!” she exclaimed, putting her hands to her shell-like ears, and giving the French shrug which Maitland did not relish.

Randal laughed again.

A shade—an involuntary look of pain swept suddenly across the elder sister's features. She looked from one to the other, and anyone who knew her well

could have traced in the expressive face a rapidly-formed determination.

“It is not right to scoff so pitilessly at our good neighbours,” she said in her lowest, gravest, tones; “and I think, dear, if you were to try and be a little more sociable, a little more ——”

But Rosette’s tiny foot was already beating an impatient tattoo on the grass, and she cut the sentence tail-less by saying with one of her merry laughs—

“If you are going to lecture me I shall go. I have nothing to do with sociability or any other ‘ilities.’”

“I only meant ——” began Maitland.

“Oh dear me, you won’t let me have the last word! The last word is always my prerogative,” interrupted Rosette, disappearing rapidly down the hill with glissading gait, to which the Llandyffryn matrons had already taken exception. The two who were left together looked after her in some dismay, but they knew she was safely in advance of them, by the musical voice which con-

stantly indulged in roulades and trills, as naturally as a canary bird when it hops on its perch. No wonder that Maitland felt as if by her sister's side she must seem like a bird of very dull plumage indeed.

It was not Rosette's fault—it was the way in which she had been educated. But why did Randal look so amused when she declared that she liked nothing better than a game of *bésique*, involving no thinking, or a trashy novel?

Why did he laugh so heartily when she assured him that, if she read something sensible aloud to please her father, she was like Milton's daughters reading Greek, and had not the faintest idea of profiting by what she read.

Mr. Gathorne had told her in his didactic manner that such reading was a profitable occupation for a "young female." To which Rosette had answered, passing her hand over her forehead in a pretty way which was habitual to her.

"Then I wish I were not a young female."

"How will it end?" thought Maitland in dismay, "Who is to buy her new things when the present stock is worn out?"

"How wonderfully pretty she looks to-day—that coronet of hair is certainly very becoming," remarked Randal, after a pause.

"She never wears her hair in the same fashion for two days together."

"No—her personal appearance is like her character—it shares the continual charm of movement in her changeful nature."

"I wish she were not quite so fond of change," answered Maitland, whose own nature was too crystalline to hide a feeling if it chanced to be unamiable, and who was yet unreasonable enough to dislike to hear Randal praise her sister, and conscious of a bitter under-current of feeling about many of these passing words since Rosette's arrival.

For in these few weeks Rosette had taken people by surprise. Such a real artist in dress had never been seen at Llandyffryn. One day she would appear with her hair gathered up in a tasty little head-dress like that of Anne Boleyn or of Agnes Sorel, and on another it would be rolling loosely down her shoulders, as she lounged about in a sort of white peignoir, with dark blue ribbons, which seemed to deepen the tints of her eyes. The fantastic Gainsborough fringe in which this same hair was cut on her blue-veined forehead, the queer little hats and bonnets, and the dresses which were supposed to be Parisian, and therefore in some mysterious way wicked, with the high heels which she persisted in wearing to the imminent peril of her neck, and with which she clattered down the hills, or up and down the stairs of the cottage, had all been subjects of animadversion to the severer of the Llandyffryn matrons. And yet whatever Rosette wore—driving to despair the most talented dressmakers of

the neighbourhood—she managed to look pretty in it. “You might have dressed her,” as one of the Llandyffryn ladies remarked, “only in a white sheet tossed over her with a pitchfork,” and even that material would have fallen in artistic folds on her perfect figure. She did not need the assistance of her eccentric toilettes. But Maitland, who would not wear a flower in her bonnet, and who had her dresses made after the obsolete fashions of past years, began to look more than ever like a quaint little grandmother by her side. Harry had noticed the odd contrast with more frankness than gallantry, adding when he saw he had vexed his elder sister,

“Never you care! Tall, dressy women are the most admired, they say; but take my word for it, little ones are most beloved; and after all it would not do for *you* to imitate Rosette. You would look—well, like an Indian wearing Manchester prints, instead of his native costume.”

“You are a pert, nonsensical boy,”

answered Maitland, good-humouredly; "as if I ever thought it was possible for me to look like Rosette! How exquisitely cool she manages to look on the very hottest days! No redness in *her* nose. The heat which makes ordinary people like me quite ugly, only adds such a splendid carnation to *her* cheeks."

And yet as long as Harry stayed at Llandyffryn his downright speaking had some effect in restraining Rosette's vagaries.

"Hulloa," he would say, "you are fishing for compliments?—you are nearly a woman, and talking like a baby," or, "I should like to have Etons and Winchesters for girls—then they wouldn't be so greedy for praise as they are now." To all of which Rosette had answered with a little impatient toss of her head. "We mustn't expect favourable criticism from near relations."

As long as her brother had lingered it seemed as if she had taken some pains to perform the toilette of her mind as

well as of her body. She had prepared her set phrases and repeated her prettiest speeches, without openly expressing her abhorrence for the "driving, tearing, work-a-day life" which it seemed to her relations she led at Llandyffryn. But as soon as Harry was gone, she was more variable in her moods, becoming by turns coquettish, disdainful, fascinating, and greedy for pleasure. She began to exclaim against the dullness of the Llandyffryn people, saying of them.

"They eat, and then they sleep; it seems to me as if they pass their lives in a continual lethargy. I long to wake them from their long siesta."

"And yet you did not like Aunt's friends any better."

"Not lately," she said with a shrug; "when Aunt became like all old women—as sour as if she had been dipped in a vinegar-cruet."

And then, for Randal's edification, she volunteered a dismal account of her Aunt's house, with its curtains and its



sofas of ugly tints, or dull grey faded by time, and with the corpse of a grand piano covered with leather;—a house where the people laughed as they talked at certain fixed hours, for just so long a time, and where war was waged with draughts of air from morning till night.

She acted as she described, illustrating her stories by mimicry which showed all the skill of an artist, and the drollery of a comedian.

She was, perhaps, the most inimitable when she described the experiences she had gained during her former little experience of continental life. With a turn of her head—with a toilet-cover and a sheet of paper, she could improvise a head-dress or a peasant's costume. And yet in all her amusing attitudes she managed never to lose an atom of her grace, and in all her comic poses she still maintained her elegance, resuming afterwards the air of a tired Queen.

It was in one of these tired moods, that she said honestly enough to her sister with the pretty gesture with which she pushed away the golden fringe from her brow, and revealed the delicate veins on her transparent forehead.

"I hope it isn't very wrong of me. But I am getting rather tired of this humdrum state of things. How long is it to last? I want to live my life. Everybody has a history, they say; I want *mine* to begin."

Tired! yes no doubt she was tired, in spite of so often looking like an incarnation of sunshine. What else could you expect? "A little birdseed" she had promised would be sufficient for her wants, but it seemed that the birdseed was to be sufficiently varied. As well might you attempt to imprison a will-o'-the-wisp, or to catch the summer lightning, as to chain this fairy-like creature who did not care for a country life to a sober matter-of-fact out-of-the-world existence!

And yet Maitland wished she had not acknowledged it so openly. It seemed to give a fresh sting to her lover's remark.

“How are you to hope to amuse her here?”

## CHAPTER XIV.

“**H**OW are you to hope to amuse her here?”

As if “Fairy,” as her whimsical nickname seemed to show, literally belonged to a superior order of beings, to be fed upon honeydew, and nourished with sunshine! The remark had caused a passing jar to Maitland’s feelings, making her suddenly miserable, in a way that was little suspected by others, and soon forgotten by herself. She had never had much time to analyse her feelings, and only wondered what it meant. What wasp had stung her that she should feel such a sudden smart? For she,

who with her woman's instincts had a great measure of a man's strength of character, was ready enough to laugh at her own absurdity. "A mere touch, a slight stroke," she thought in self-scorn ;— "could it be possible *she* had felt it? *she* who had fancied she did not care about these surface grazes like some women, and who did not pride herself on the sleekness of the epidermis.

Yet though she could not understand anyone not liking Rosette—though she admired her sister as usual when she entered the room like a ray of sunshine on the following morning, radiant and handsome as in the first days of her arrival, with her face decked with smiles, and dressed in some pale pink material, toned with pearly shades, reminding her of the exquisite warm grey shadows in the guelder roses—she found it difficult to forget her causes of disapproval. For though it was no wonder that Rosette felt herself superior to the domestic dowdies of Llandyffryn, and

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certainly no occasion for him to take the train and offer his daughter to Prince Charming."

The joke seemed to Maitland in bad taste, and she did not speak as he added, with an attempt at looking sly,

"Who knows? he may turn up in the wilds of Wales, perhaps?"

"Who?" asked Maitland, colouring a brilliant crimson.

"Why, Prince Charming, of course. Don't you see it would be a very good arrangement, if Mr. Stanton—"

She made a movement to interrupt her father, but on second thoughts she stopped herself in her frank movement, and determined not to undeceive him. The same reasons which had closed her lips before closed them more firmly than ever now. For what after all had she to tell? Was she not like a general who had voluntarily surrendered his power—like a captain who had burnt his own ships to cut off all chances of retreat? The room felt as if it were circling round,

and she scarcely heard what her father said, as he went on to build up a whole superstructure of romance on slender needle-points of theory.

"I think you mistake," was all she said, as soon as her dry lips could pronounce the sounds. "She is not the romantic girl you think her. Tender—yes. Sentimental—no. Imagination is not her forte."

But there was no denying that Rosette, whose spirits were sometimes as elastic as a good kid glove, had become again, from some cause which was difficult to define, like an incarnation of sunshine in the house. Probably she believed no more than her father did in the possibility of a miracle presenting itself in the form of a prince in a fairy tale. And yet she had been so used to homage all her life that she had no fear lest the homage should end on account of her temporary seclusion.

"What can be the use of this tiresome plain needlework?" she asked impatiently



that day, pirouetting round her sister ;  
“ hem and gusset and seam ? ”

“ I wish you would go down and not fidget so , ” said Maitland with a little sigh, watching the restless beauty as she went tip-toeing round the room, examining all the commonest little lares and penates in her inquisitive fashion.

“ I am going down presently , ” she answered looking out of the window ; “ Oh, there comes the Squire of Llandyffryn ! I wonder what attraction causes him to linger about us. A man cannot possibly do anything in such a hole of a place . ”

Maitland's eyes flashed for a moment with temper, but the flash was instantly subdued, and the look of scorn which came into her noble face was hidden as she bent it more closely over the weary work of mending.

“ He had settled down here before I came , ” continued the irrepressible fairy ; “ It seems that even then he was a constant visitor at the house, and yet

you and he could have little in common."

"According to *you*," answered Maitland, in her quietest tones; "and why, may I ask?"

"Because you do not suit each other at all."

"The subject is not one which admits of joking."

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" continued Rosette unabashed; "I am sure I did not mean to put embarrassing questions."

"Does she suspect anything?" Maitland asked herself suddenly, with that odd sensation, as if something were pricking at her heart. "No, of course she does not. Sarcastic people are so rarely sensitive. She is not responsible for the raillery which has so many stings," and then she said aloud—

"There is no sobering you."

In another minute Rosette sped quickly out of the room, and down the stairs to the ground-floor of the house.

“Is she going to meet him, I wonder?” thought Maitland, with a weary feeling which chained her more determinately than ever to her needle-work; “If she is—what does it matter? It amuses her a little to see somebody fresh; and Rosette likes her pleasures spread out thin over a good large surface. I doubt if she could possibly understand a tragedy, or whether she ever entered into a strong feeling in her life; but she is like a child that must have its bit of cake, and even when it has it means to make its cake last, instead of demolishing its sweets all at once.”

Maitland did not go down, but the ordeal of her day was not nearly over. For when the evening came, and when she went to her crippled brother as usual, to give him his supper and see him comfortably in bed, Steenie was murmuring and unhappy.

She usually sang to him at this hour in the evening, but on this special night she could only hum a tune with quavering breath. The change in her voice instantly

caught his ear, and he leapt to a conclusion as if by instinct.

"Ah, they are neglecting *you*," he said, "as they are forgetting *me*. Why did your fine London swell make such a fuss about us if he wished to throw us over directly Rosette appeared?"

"Hush—sh!" she said, with a swift, sudden pang at her heart; "I suppose you miss the walks, dear, but the weather is too hot. I wish I were strong enough to push your chair without help."

"Why doesn't *he* help you, as he helped you before she came?"

"You might get a sunstroke if you were to go out in the heat."

"That is nonsense," he said, tearing away the sophistry with a boyish directness; "it was hot before she came, and there is plenty of shade."

The child judged in his innocent severity, without any idea of the keen-edged blow he was aiming at the one being he loved better than any on earth.

"They leave *you* all alone, and only think of themselves. I have a great mind to tell them what I think about it," he continued resentfully. "They are walking together in the garden now."

"And why shouldn't they leave me alone?" she answered quickly, with a smiling face. "It is very kind of you, Steenie dear, to like to make everything smooth, but I really don't want you to fight my battles. I am not one of those people who cry out for sympathy directly any thorn scratches them."

The "enfant terrible" looked puzzled, but still a little wistful. He had evidently more to say, but she silenced any further confidences by vigorously tucking him up in his bed; and wishing that by some exertion of her physical strength it were as possible to silence the urgent cry of her own heart, and summon to her assistance her usual thorough power of self-control.

What, after all, had Steenie said? He had only hinted at the same suspicion

which had more than once recurred to her already, with the new clairvoyance which love had given her.

From the first she had seen that Randal was but a weak specimen of human nature, but she laid all his failings to the score of his temptations, and loved him—such is a woman's inconsistency—not in spite of, but in consequence of his very imperfections.

And now, though the stern voice of common sense, which would not be hushed, still said to her, “When things begin by going astray, they are sure to be lost in the end;” or, “When there is a single crack in the china, or a first little rift in lute, it is all over with the value of the vase, or the beauty of the music; and though the same voice of reason cruelly reminded her of the terrible indefiniteness of the tie which bound her to Randal, still she drove the doubts away from her with a kind of horror.

She was as cheerful as usual that evening, yet the wound still bled internally, as

she laid herself down to rest, when the other inhabitants of the cottage were wrapped in slumber; telling herself that she would not be haunted by the idea which Steenie's words had suggested, and that she would cast the miserable jealousy, once and for all, out of her heart. Yet though she curled herself up in her nest, and tried to shut her eyes, sleep would not come to her, for the first time in her experience. She tried counting backwards and forwards, and had recourse to Wordsworth's formulary of an imaginary flock of sheep, but, to her astonishment, she was not even drowsy.

"This will not do," she said energetically to herself, when the twittering of birds announced the approach of daybreak. and she was surprised to find herself quivering with nervous depression. "This state of things cannot possibly go on, you know; *you*, Maitland Gathorne, who call yourself a Christian, you are letting circumstances conquer you, you are not making an effort to conquer them."

And rising when the morning light streamed into the room, she sat down to an essay which she had left uncompleted, a few days before, on her old wooden desk, and added these words to a train of thought which she had found it difficult to complete before:—

“The asceticism of the old monks resulted in great part from the unnatural separation which they attempted to effect between human and Divine love. It seems strange at first sight that men who dared not lift up their eyes to heaven, should yet have prided themselves on looking down on their fellow-creatures. We may rule love, and direct it in obedience to law. But we need never be afraid of loving too much. Error in love argues a deficiency in it, instead of excess.”



## CHAPTER XV.

**I**N all energetic natures, a resolution firmly taken, acts like an antiseptic to much that is injurious.

Maitland had made up her mind as to a settled line of action, and from that time the thoughts which had tormented her seemed to vanish, like vapours rolled from the face of a lake. Not so with Rosette. As the weeks passed on, her spirits noticeably flagged. Longing, as she did, for an existence full of movement, distraction, and variety, the life at Llandyffryn was contrary to all her instincts. She attempted for some time to hide her aversion to it, but with a woman of her sort, reason

can never prevail over sensation. The suffering caused by ennui was a fact to her, and she was simply obeying a law of nature, by trying to shake off the oppression in every possible manner. Her fits of gaiety began to be succeeded by periods of depression, during which she ate little, and spoke less—it seemed to Maitland sometimes almost in monosyllables.

“Don’t you see what is the matter with her?” said Randal abruptly, one day; “she is dying of ennui. It will never do to condemn her to the monotony of your own life. She is not a desert flower, born to bloom unseen.”

And the elder sister, who had hoped that it was only a passing shadow, and that the younger one would accustom herself by degrees to the new state of things, was compelled to admit that Randal’s judgment was the correct one, and that “Fairy” *did* begin to look pale and sad, in a way in which it was quite unnatural for a fairy to look.

"But we can't possibly leave Llandyffryn," she said in despair.

"No, but—excuse me—you have not half exhausted the resources of the place. Why not take her to Barfordd, for instance? She would see a few people there, and the row on the river towards the sea is really a very pleasant one."

"Would you like to make a day at Barfordd, and go out in a boat? Harry is coming back for a day or two before he leaves England, and he and Mr. Stanton would row us, if you are not afraid of the water," Maitland asked her sister that very evening, catching at the suggestion. And the way in which Rosette answered, with unaccustomed vivacity.

"Anything rather than stay here," showed that Randal's estimate of her lady had not been an untrue one.

Everything promised well on the morning of the expedition. The August day was fine and hot, with a pellucid expanse of the sky, and a few faint promontories of white cloud, which did not alarm any-

one about the weather, and only relieved the intense cobalt.

But Rosette never felt the heat, and Randal stopped himself when he was about to tell her that it was 78 degrees in the shade; for what did she know about the thermometer? Her colour had returned, and she had one of the reactions of sparkling merriment in which her high spirits seemed to absorb all her sister's strength and brightness; and Maitland, who had been lately more economical than usual, and who was dressed in an ugly-coloured cotton garment, old fashioned and ill-made, because it had been hoarded from previous summers, looked more than ever like a foil by her side.

"Whew! this is rather too much of a good thing. We ought to be salamanders to do anything in this grilling heat. If there was only a breath of air stirring," grumbled Harry, a few hours afterwards, as he divested himself of his coat, and ran the boat down the sandy bank, into the river.

"A breath of air! Do you mean wind?" chimed in Rosette, with her eyes dancing; "we have enough of wind, in all conscience, at your savage Llandyffryn! Wind blowing in one's teeth—cutting one's eyes—shaking one's hat, and nearly strangling one with its violence. It is a wonder I am not pulled to pieces by the very gentlest of your zephyrs. If I had false teeth or false hair, I don't know what would have become of me;" she added, with a little grimace, as she gathered her skirts about her, and tripped gingerly into a comfortably cushioned seat. It was a pretty white and green boat, which Randal had hired for the occasion, and it had been brought ready for their use past the stony part of the river to an attractive little creek, where the old trunks of some fir trees made a natural pier.

It was one of those luxuriant bits of water and meadow scenery, in which artist and poet alike delight. In winter you could not have imagined the possibility of

such a fertile valley, surrounded by rich fields, with cattle knee-deep in grass ; and deep chasms, with cool, refreshing shadows. On this glorious August day, there was a superabundance of life in it, with a multitudinous hum of insects, from the brown and green beetles trampling through the blades of grass, to the lady-birds, studding the leaves like gems, and the bees feasting in flower-bells ; from the painted butterflies and blue dragon flies with gauzy wings, skimming over the surface of the stream, to the little fish which could be dimly seen through the brown water, the diving otter, or the water-rat which plunged away as the boat drew near. Now they startled a king-fisher, which disappeared before they could notice it, with a rapid flash of its wings ; and now they caught sight of a shy trout, which darted for a moment on the surface of the stream, whilst the more stately heron held its ground, standing solemnly in the shallows till the boat drew near, and then flying away with

trailing legs, as if it had preserved its dignity. The stream itself was beautiful, with its little wavelets chasing each other ; its tiny bubbles, its cool depths, and its hurrying waters, coloured into rich loveliness by the moss-grown stones beneath it.

Even Rosette, who did not generally notice the scenery, was charmed for a time with the variety of the landscape, as they floated languidly with the tide past the narrow footpath on the grassy fields which bounded the river, and which were tapestried with a rich abundance of wild summer flowers. Much exertion in the way of rowing was certainly not necessary, but Maitland, who was determined that Harry should enjoy his holiday, had quietly taken an oar, and seemed to be so busy with it as not to notice that whilst Rosette looked about her, and made exclamations of childish joy, Randal apparently saw only Rosette.

“Fairy should learn to row,” said her brother presently, when he too began

to pull with a will, and the boat went on at a rattling pace.

"I?—I could never do anything useful," she answered with a laugh, holding up her tiny hands, which presented a marked contrast to her sister's well-shaped, muscular, rather burnt, and not over-small hands.

"You should try and stretch your paws," remarked Harry patronisingly; "All sensible girls row."

She shrugged her shoulders with the pretty little mocking air which became her so well and answered again.

"You are accustomed to associate with *sensible* people. But I never was one; you must take me as I am—I must say I have a horror of sensible people."

No one responded to her little sally, but Maitland set her teeth together as she worked more vigorously, till the upper lip and chin looked short and drawn up, and Randal began to see what she would be like when she was an old woman.



"Confess then," he said, breaking the silence, "you don't like this country life."

"That depends on circumstances—it is possible I may get accustomed to it—in time," she said slowly, as she met his eyes, and her clear skin glowed as she emphasized her answer.

"You won't find it very difficult."

"I dare say not."

"Women are so changeable," he responded, with another laugh, apparently forgetting Maitland, who still did not join in the conversation, and who sat so occupied and silent, that her manner seemed to have become chilling to him—almost repellant. In reality he did not forget her; he was intensely conscious of her presence, but he was thinking bitterly to himself how absurd he had been to suppose that a woman who was so self-controlled, and with such superior endowments, could ever have cared for him.

The heat seemed to increase as they

reached that part of the river where it flowed into the sea. The last time Randal had visited it, in the spring, the sea had been of an emerald green, with purple stains of shadow cast from the clouds,—all the gorse had been in bloom, and a breath of hay had been wafted from the warm uplands. Then there had been a flavour of salt in the fresh briny breeze, but now scarcely a breath of air was stirring. The water was now of a pale opal green, with sunlight basking on its surface with innumerable diamond rays which seemed to twinkle like stars, and with the exception of a solitary little wave which was curving itself in with a gentle swash upon the beach—where a party of children were digging and shovelling the loose sand—there was not a ripple to be seen. But far off, towards the horizon, where the green deepened into the colour of majolica, a flock of cloudlets was rising like inoffensive lambs.

Harry pointed to the horizon, and said in an aside to Randal,

"You won't think of trying the caves to-day. Rain, or something of the kind is coming."

"The rain won't hurt us; the boat has an awning," answered Stanton, in a low tone, lazily whiffing at his cigar. "We are to dine in the principal cave. I see no reason for funking it. I am determined that poor child shall enjoy herself for once."

"It is a mad fellow's scheme," said Harry, beneath his breath; and then he added in a louder voice, "You don't know the coast."

"I know it as well as you do. Don't you frighten the ladies," answered Randal, more authoritatively; "If we get a few drops of rain it will really be most welcome, for the intense glare of this sunlight is more than one can stand; but I can't say I expect such luck from those pretty little 'moutons.'"

Harry, who was not familiar with these

new-fangled ways, and in his heart looked upon Randal as "a horrid, self-sufficient swell," made a mental grimace at him, but no further dissent. On they rowed with all speed, though the fierce angry blaze of sunshine towards the deep recesses to which they were bound, beneath a jagged limestone cliff, which stood out in bas-relief like some Druidical rock in the foreground, or sanctuary for awful rites over the vault-like depths of the sea. They were nearing the point when there was a palpable darkening of the sky, and Harry, sorely ill at ease, looked anxiously at Randal.

"Pull ahead!" answered the latter. But already the breeze had risen, so that though they worked laboriously, the distance was not lessened.

The sea was beginning to be covered in the distance with tiny flashing breakers, and the swirl of water from a tidal wave was coming slowly in their direction.

"We must turn her head round," said

Harry, a little sulkily; "I warned you before we set out; it is a difficult bit of coast."

They turned the boat's head, but the increasing gloom enveloped them, their clothes began to be saturated with a cloud of drizzling spray, and the undulations of ground swell began to heave up and down, like the hills and valleys of the mainland.

"We shall have a glorious opportunity of viewing a sea-storm in full perfection; with a chance of being shivered into annihilation," muttered Harry, a little hoarsely, as he looked at Rosette's frightened face. And the girl, who was already alarmed—she hardly knew at what,—and who would have preferred a less tragic explanation of the mystery, added with a sickly smile,

"I am the only one who can't swim, you will recollect that. I wish I were like Maitland, who can swim like a dolphin, or an otter;" she added with the same sickly attempt at laughing.

"All nonsense about swimming—you are as safe as if you were in your bed," said Randal reassuringly.

"As if a woman's swimming would be worth anything in a sea like this," growled Harry, who had thoroughly lost his temper. "Dear me," he added contemptuously to himself, "she needn't be so afraid of seeming to love her neighbour as well as herself. Nobody ever suspected her of it."

They were trying to near the land, with every muscle exerted, but the shadow was still wrapping them remorselessly in its pall; and the boat was driven backwards and forwards by the breakers.

"Look out for the rocks," exclaimed Harry, loudly, and just at that moment there was a flash as of a fiery sword cleaving the darkness, and slicing the black clouds, followed by a crash of artillery.

"Sit still," he said sternly; for as soon as the thunder had ceased, a long and agonising scream rang through the air, and

Rosette, holding out her little hands in wild and beseeching prayer, had thrown herself from her place in anticipation of instant death.

"Good God!" cried her brother, "are you mad? Maitland, *make* her keep her place, or she will capsize us."

"Remember who it is that rides upon the storm, and holds the winds in the hollow of His hands," whispered the elder sister, reassuringly, for the moment relinquishing her oar.

But fear seemed to have petrified the girl into the likeness of marble. With her hands clasped on her bosom, and her pretty muslin dress drenched with the salt spray—she looked like some despairing mermaid, and seemed to have lost all power of moving. It was impossible to make her hear Harry's imperative voice, or the supplicating words of her sister. Her eyes alone seemed to be the eyes of the living, and they had suddenly kindled into an almost superhuman expressiveness as they were fixed upon Randal, whom she believed

to be the only one who had the power to help her, with a gaze like the spell of fascination.


"She was always terribly afraid of thunder," said Maitland with a half-apology, as the sheen of the lightning again lit up the group, and poor Rosette's great beseeching eyes still turned to him, opened wide with fear and hope. The look seemed to have power to turn Randal's brain. To judge clearly in such an emergency, the head must be perfectly calm and cool, and he felt that all his coolness had deserted him—so much so that he had not time to be surprised at Maitland's calm and equable manner.

"Pull hard!" cried practical Harry. It was for life or death. No one said it, but each one knew it. For the rain had begun falling like a blinding cataract, and great balls of foamy surf were chasing one another like gigantic snowballs, in a settled direction—the way of the wind and the current of the water. The wind set so strongly in that direction, that they were



sometimes driven powerlessly by it, with the momentary fear of being submerged in the mountains of water. Nothing was heard for a few instants but the long weird dirge of the ominous waves. The rowers were becoming exhausted, but they were certainly nearing the seething mass of surf, which now took the place of the little rippling wave, which but a short time before had been curling on the beach.

They were nearing it when the boat came into collision with one of the saturated and slimy rocks which caused the principal danger of that coast, and which could be seen with their treacherous points covered with slippery seaweed, at certain periods of low water. Harry knew the danger, and made one desperate effort to push away from the pointed crag, by a skilful movement of his oar, but the movement was too rapid for them, the balance was disturbed, and the boat overturned, with another long, piercing shriek from Rosette, as it seemed, into the midst of a foaming whirlpool.



Randal hesitated not an instant. In that critical moment his whole nature seemed to have expanded into a sort of heroism which came natural to him by virtue of his manhood. He forgot his own danger and determined to save the women—Rosette first, and afterwards the stronger Maitland. It was one plunge into the froth-foam close beside him, and then fortune favoured him, he was able to grasp the girl just as she was sinking.


“Trust me, he said hoarsely, not stopping to reason about consequences in his sickening anxiety, “trust me, and don’t struggle. Lie still, and don’t exert yourself.”

Her beautiful eyes looked at him with that look which terror had given her of wonderful expressiveness, and then her head sank on his shoulder, and a wild joy seized him as he commenced his struggle with the sharp rocks, and the belt of white surf, through which it seemed at first that no swimmer could win.

But Randal had been early trained in


the art of swimming, and though the retiring waters seemed to draw him downwards as he nearly reached the shore, and though he was so encumbered by his burden that he was several times thrown back from the landing-place when he had nearly reached his footing, still he held that burden tightly with a sense of a triumphant possession.

At last, in spite of these repeated repulses, he managed to reach the shore, but his mental energies were so exhausted that he forgot for the instant the existence of other strugglers in the water. Fortunately for him, Rosette had been insensible for the last few moments, or it might have been impossible for him to save her. But as he looked in that instant at her pretty child-like face, with the eyes closed as if in sleep, the heavy fair hair streaming to her waist, and the dead whiteness of the skin, he feared that his labour had been in vain. It was one of those critical moments in which a temptation for which we are not prepared may suddenly present



itself. For as Randal bent over Rosette, she opened her eyes languidly, and gazed at him as in a dream, steadily and caressingly. He turned his head away, feeling as if his senses were deserting him, his determination melting away from him, and the fibres of his will relaxing. Yet as if the momentum imparted by that look were sufficient to make him speak, he murmured something beneath his breath. She heard it, and trembled, and then the past which had been obliterated for a few moments rushed again upon his memory.

“Maitland—where was Maitland?” He rallied his whole force at the recollection of her name, and sprang to his feet, reproaching himself for his unpremeditated incaution. No one but himself should save Maitland from the wild currents which were clashing in with that frantic discord. And yet he had deserted her—to what a tremendous fate? The question was an agonizing one, but as he looked round it was solved for him. There was a crowd on the beach, with some fishermen in the



crowd. And one of the fishermen was venturing up to his shoulders in the surf, throwing a rope to two people who were also in the water. The gusts of wind caught the dangling cord, and blew it away from them. But at last it was grasped by one of the two who were clinging together, and Harry and his sister were brought safely to land.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.









